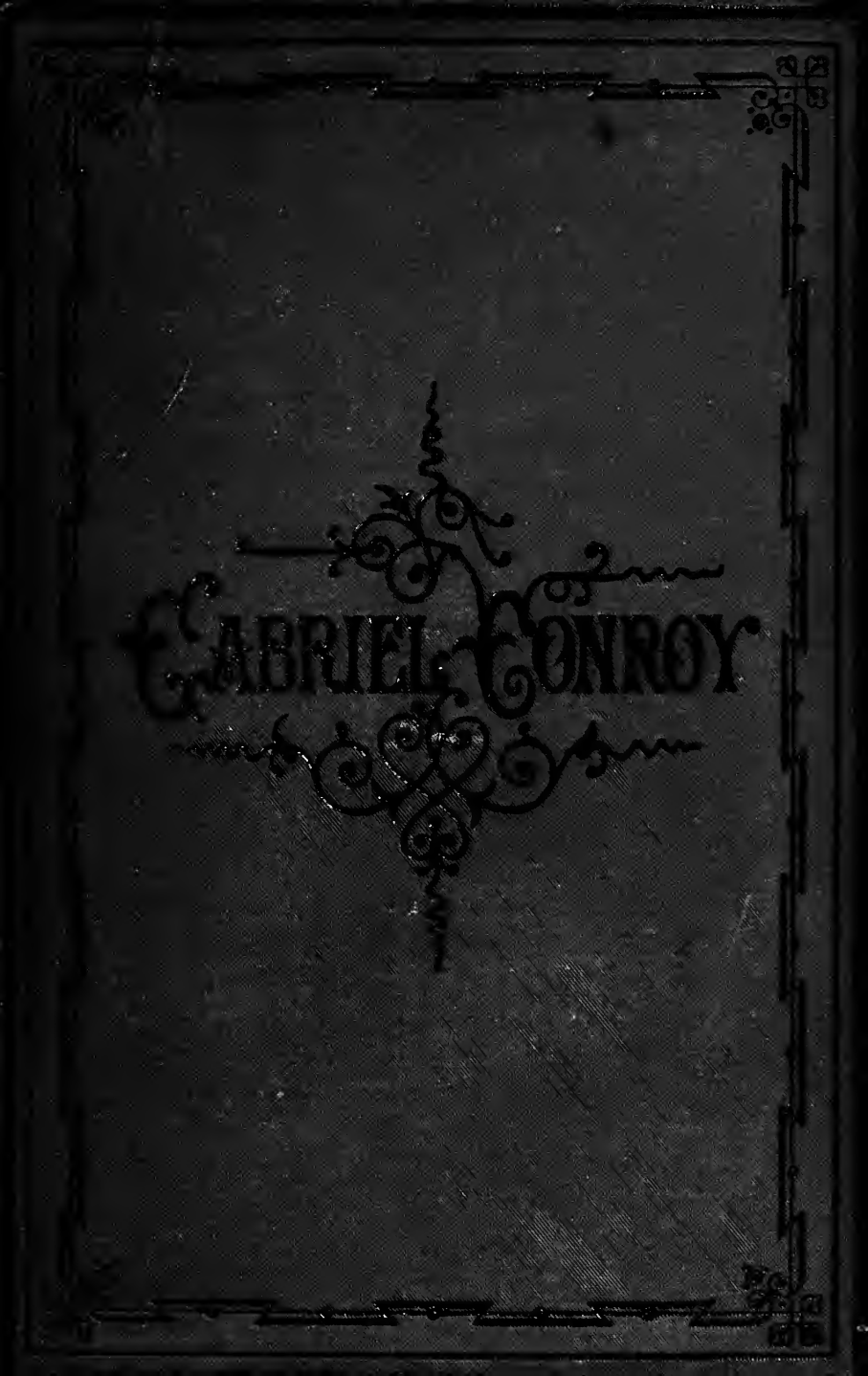
GABRIEL CONROY

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GABRIEL CONROY.

GABRIEL CONROY.

A Novel.

BY

BRET HARTE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

BOOK III.—(*continued*).

THE LEAD.

CHAP.		PAGE
VII.	A LEAF OUT OF THE PAST	3
VIII.	THE BULLS OF THE BLESSED TRINITY . . .	15

BOOK IV.

DRIFTING.

I.	MR. AND MRS. CONROY AT HOME	29
II.	IN WHICH THE TREASURE IS FOUND—AND LOST	53
III.	MR. DUMPHY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND	77
IV.	MR. JACK HAMLIN TAKES A HOLIDAY	90
V.	VICTOR MAKES A DISCOVERY	108
VI.	AN EXPERT	124

BOOK V.

THE VEIN.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	IN WHICH GABRIEL RECOGNISES THE PROPRIETIES	145
II.	TRANSIENT GUESTS AT THE GRAND CONROY	170
III.	IN WHICH MR. DUMPHY TAKES A HOLIDAY	185
IV.	MR. DUMPHY HAS NEWS OF A DOMESTIC CHARACTER	211
V.	MRS. CONROY HAS AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR	231
VI.	GABRIEL DISCARDS HIS HOME AND WEALTH	246
VII.	WHAT PASSED UNDER THE PINE AND WHAT REMAINED THERE	256

BOOK VI.

A DIP.

I.	MR. HAMLIN'S RECREATION CONTINUED	279
II.	MR. HAMLIN TAKES A HAND	293

BOOK III.

(*Continued.*)

THE LEAD.

CHAPTER VII.

A LEAF OUT OF THE PAST.

ARTHUR'S letter to his partners was a brief explanation of his delay, and closed with the following sentence—

"Search the records for any deed or transfer of the grant from Dr. Devarges."

He had scarcely concluded before Diego entered ready for the journey. When he had gone Arthur waited with some impatience the reappearance of Donna Dolores. To his disappointment, however, only the solemn major-domo strode grimly into the room like a dark-complexioned ghost, and, as it seemed to Arthur, with a strong suggestion of the Commander in Don Giovanni in his manner, silently beckoned him to follow to the apartment set aside for his reception. In keeping with the sun-evading in-

stincts of Spanish Californian Architecture the room was long, low, and half lighted; the two barred windows on either side of the doorway gave upon the corridor and courtyard below; the opposite wall held only a small narrow, deeply embrasured loop-hole, through which Arthur could see the vast, glittering sun-illumined plain beyond. The hard, monotonous, unwinking glare without did not penetrate the monastic gloom of this chamber; even the insane, incessant restlessness of the wind that perpetually beset the bleak walls was unheard and unfelt in the grave, contemplative solitude of this religious cell.

Mingled with this grateful asceticism was the quaint contrast of a peculiar Spanish luxuriousness. In a curtained recess an immense mahogany bedstead displayed a yellow satin coverlet profusely embroidered with pink and purple silk flowers. The borders of the sheets and cases of the satin pillows were deeply edged with the finest lace. Beside the bed and before a large armchair heavy rugs of barbaric colours covered the dark wooden floor, and in front

of the deep oven-like hearth lay an immense bear-skin. Above the hearth hung an ebony and gold crucifix, and, mingled with a few modern engravings, the usual Catholic saints and martyrs occupied the walls. It struck Arthur's observation oddly that the subjects of the secular engravings were snow landscapes. The Hospice of St. Bernard in winter, a pass in the Austrian Tyrol, the Steppes of Russia, a Norwegian plain, all to Arthur's fancy brought the temperature of the room down considerably. A small water-colour of an Alpine flower touched him so closely that it might have blossomed from his recollection.

Dinner, which was prefaced by a message from Donna Dolores excusing herself through indisposition, was served in solemn silence. A cousin of the late Don José Salvatierra represented the family and pervaded the meal with a mild flavour of stale cigaritos and dignified criticism of remote events. Arthur, disappointed at the absence of the Donna, found himself regarding this gentleman with some degree of asperity and a disposition to resent any reference to his

client's business as an unwarrantable impertinence. But when the dinner was over, and he had smoked a cigar on the corridor without further communication with Donna Dolores, he began to be angry with himself for accepting her invitation, and savagely critical of the motives that impelled him to it. He was meditating an early retreat—even a visit to Mrs. Sepulvida — when Manuela entered.

Would Don Arturo grant the Donna his further counsel and presence?

Don Arturo was conscious that his cheek was flushing, and that his counsel at the present moment would not have been eminently remarkable for coolness or judiciousness, but he followed the Indian woman with a slight inclination of the head. They entered the room where he had first met the Donna. She might not have moved from the position she had occupied that morning on the couch, so like was her attitude and manner. As he approached her respectfully, he was conscious of the same fragrance, and the same mysterious magnetism that seemed to leap from her dark

eyes, and draw his own resisting and unwilling gaze toward her.

"You will despise me, Don Arturo—you, whose countrywomen are so strong and active—because I am so little and weak, and, —Mother of God!—so lazy! But I am an invalid, and am not yet quite recovered. But then I am accustomed to it. I have lain here for days, Don Arturo, doing nothing. It is weary—eh? You think? This watching, this waiting!—day after day—always the same!"

There was something so delicately plaintive and tender in the cadence of her speech —a cadence that might, perhaps, have been attributed to the characteristic intonation of the Castilian feminine speech, but which Arthur could not help thinking was peculiar to herself, that at the moment he dared not lift his eyes to her, although he was conscious she was looking at him. But by an impulse of safety he addressed himself to the fan.

"You have been an invalid then—Donna Dolores?"

"A sufferer, Don Arturo."

"Have you ever tried the benefit of change of scene—of habits of life? Your ample means, your freedom from the cares of family or kinship, offer you such opportunities," he continued, still addressing the fan.

But the fan, as if magnetized by his gaze, became coquettishly conscious; fluttered, faltered, drooped, and then languidly folded its wings. Arthur was left helpless.

"Perhaps," said Donna Dolores: "who knows?"

She paused for an instant, and then made a sign to Manuela. The Indian woman rose and left the room.

"I have something to tell you, Don Arturo," she continued, "something I should have told you this morning. It is not too late now. But it is a secret. It is only that I have questioned my right to tell it—not that I have doubted your honour, Don Arturo, that I withheld it then."

Arthur raised his eyes to hers. It was her turn to evade his glance. With her long lashes dropped, she went on—

"It was five years ago, and my father—

whom may the Saints assoil—was alive. Came to us then at the Presidio of San Geronimo, a young girl—an American, a stranger and helpless. She had escaped from a lost camp in the snowy mountains where her family and friends were starving. That was the story she told my father. It was a probable one—was it not?"

Arthur bowed his head but did not reply.

"But the name that she gave was not a true one, as it appeared. My father had sent an *Expedicion* to relieve these people, and they had found among the dead the person whom this young girl—the stranger—assumed to be. That was their report. The name of the young girl who was found dead and the name of the young girl who came to us was the same. It was Grace Conroy."

Arthur's face did not move a muscle, nor did he once take his eyes from the drooping lids of his companion.

"It was a grave matter—a very grave matter. And it was the more surprising because the young girl had at first given

another name—the name of Grace Ashley—which she afterwads explained was the name of the young man who helped her to escape, and whose sister she at first assumed to be.

"My father was a good man, a kind man—a saint, Don Arturo. It was not for him to know if she were Grace Ashley or Grace Conroy—it was enough for him to know that she was alive, weak, helpless, suffering. Against the advice of his officers, he took her into his own house, into his own family, into his own fatherly heart, to wait until her brother, or this Philip Ashley, should return. He never returned. In six months she was taken ill — very ill—a little child was born—Don Arturo—but in the same moment it died and the mother died—both, you comprehend — both died — in my arms!"

"That was bad," said Arthur, curtly.

"I do not comprehend," said Donna Dolores.

"Pardon. Do not misunderstand me. I say it was bad, for I really believe that this girl the mysterious stranger, with the *alias*, was really Grace Conroy."

Donna Dolores raised her eyes and stared at Arthur.

"And why?"

"Because the identification of the bodies by the *Expedicion* was hurried and imperfect."

"How know you this?"

Arthur arose and drew his chair a little nearer his fair client.

"You have been good enough to intrust me with an important and honourable secret. Let me show my appreciation of that confidence by intrusting you with one equally important. I know that the identification was imperfect and hurried, because *I* was present. In the report of the *Expedicion* you will find the name, if you have not already read it, of Lieutenant Arthur Poinsett. That was myself."

Donna Dolores raised herself to a sitting posture.

"But why did you not tell me this before?"

"Because, first, I believed that you knew that I was Lieutenant Poinsett. Because, secondly, I did *not* believe that you knew

that Arthur Poinsett and Philip Ashley were one and the same person."

"I do not understand," said Donna Dolores slowly, in a hard metallic voice.

"I am Lieutenant Arthur Poinsett, formerly of the army, who, under the assumed name of Philip Ashley, brought Grace Conroy out of Starvation Camp. I am the person who afterward abandoned her—the father of her child."

He had not the slightest intention of saying this when he first entered the room, but something in his nature, which he had never tried to control, brought it out. He was neither ashamed of it nor apprehensive of its results; but, having said it, leaned back in his chair, proud, self-reliant, and self-sustained. If he had been uttering a moral sentiment he could not have been externally more calm or inwardly less agitated. More than that, there was a certain injured dignity in his manner, as he rose, without giving the speechless and astonished woman before him a chance to recover herself, and said—

"You will be able now to know whether

your confidence has been misplaced. You will be able now to determine what you wish done, and whether I am the person best calculated to assist you. I can only say, Donna Dolores, that I am ready to act either as your witness to the identification of the real Grace Conroy, or as your legal adviser, or both. When you have decided which, you shall give me your further commands, or dismiss me. Until then, *adios!*"

He bowed, waved his hand with a certain grand courtesy, and withdrew. When Donna Dolores raised her stupefied head, the door had closed upon him.

When this conceited young gentleman reached his own room, he was, I grieve to say, to some extent mentally, and, if I may use the word, morally exalted by the interview. More than that, he was in better spirits than he had been since his arrival. From his room he strode out into the corridor. If his horse had been saddled, he would have taken a sharp canter over the low hills for exercise, pending the decision of his fair client, but it was the hour of the noonday *siesta,* and the courtyard was de-

serted. He walked to the gate and looked across the plain. A fierce wind held uninterrupted possession of earth and sky. Something of its restlessness, just at that instant, was in Arthur's breast, and, with a glance around the corridor, and a momentary hesitation, as an opening door, in a distant part of the building, suggested the possibility of another summons from Donna Dolores, he stepped beyond the walls.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BULLS OF THE BLESSED TRINITY.

THE absolute freedom of illimitable space, the exhilaration of the sparkling sunlight, and the excitement of the opposing wind, which was strong enough to oblige him to exert a certain degree of physical strength to overcome it, so wrought upon Arthur, that in a few moments he had thrown off the mysterious spell which the Rancho of the Blessed Trinity appeared to have cast over his spirits, and had placed a material distance between himself and its gloomy towers. The landscape, which had hitherto seemed monotonous and uninspiring, now became suggestive; in the low dome-shaped hills beyond, that were huddled together like half-blown earth bubbles raised by the fiery breath of some long-dead volcano, he fancied he saw the

origin of the mission architecture. In the long sweep of the level plain, he recognised the calm, uneventful life that had left its expression in the patient gravity of the people. In the fierce, restless wind that blew over it—a wind so persistent and perpetual that all umbrage, except a narrow fringe of dwarfed willows defining the line of an extinct watercourse, was hidden in sheltered cañons and the leeward slopes of the hills—he recognised something of his own restless race, and no longer wondered at the barrenness of the life that was turned toward the invader. "I daresay," he muttered to himself, "somewhere in the leeward of these people's natures may exist a luxurious growth that we shall never know. I wonder if the Donna has not"—but here he stopped; angry, and, if the truth must be told, a little frightened at the persistency with which Donna Dolores obtruded herself into his abstract philosophy and sentiment.

Possibly something else caused him for the moment to dismiss her from his mind. During his rapid walk he had noticed, as an accidental, and by no means an essential

feature of the bleak landscape, the vast herds of crawling, purposeless cattle. An entirely new and distinct impression was now forming itself in his consciousness—namely, that they no longer were purposeless, vagrant, and wandering, but were actually obeying a certain definite law of attraction, and were moving deliberately toward an equally definite object. And that object was himself!

Look where he would; before, behind, on either side,—north, east, south, west,—on the bleak hill-tops, on the slope of the *falda*, across the dried-up *arroyo*, there were the same converging lines of slowly moving objects towards a single focus—himself! Although walking briskly, and with a certain definiteness of purpose, he was apparently the only unchanging, fixed, and limited point in the now active landscape. Everything that rose above the dead, barren level was now moving slowly, irresistibly, instinctively, but unmistakably, towards one common centre—himself! Alone and unsupported, he was the helpless, unconscious nucleus of a slowly gathering force, almost immeasurable in its immensity and power!

At first the idea was amusing and grotesque. Then it became picturesque. Then it became something for practical consideration. And then—but no!—with the quick and unerring instincts of a powerful will, he choked down the next consideration before it had time to fasten upon or paralyze his strength. He stopped and turned. The Rancho of the Blessed Trinity was gone! Had it suddenly sunk in the earth, or had he diverged from his path? Neither; he had simply walked over the little elevation in the plain beside the *arroyo* and *corral*, and had already left the Rancho two miles behind him.

It was not the only surprise that came upon him suddenly like a blow between the eyes. The same mysterious attraction had been operating in his rear, and when he turned to retrace his steps towards the Mission, he faced the staring eyes of a hundred bulls not fifty yards away. As he faced them, the nearest turned, the next rank followed their example, the next the same, and the next, until in the distance he could see the movement repeated with military precision

and sequence. With a sense of relief, that he put aside as quickly as he had the sense of fear, he quickened his pace, until the nearest bull ahead broke into a gentle trot, which was communicated line by line to the cattle beyond, until the whole herd before him undulated like a vast monotonous sea. He continued on across the *arroyo* and past the coral until the blinding and penetrating cloud of dust, raised by the plunging hoofs of the moving mass before him, caused him to stop. A dull reverberation of the plain—a sound that at first might have been attributed to a passing earthquake—now became so distinct that he turned. Not twenty yards behind him rose the advance wall of another vast, tumultuous sea of tossing horns and undulating backs that had been slowly following his retreat! He had forgotten that he was surrounded.

The nearest were now so close upon him that he could observe them separately. They were neither large, powerful, vindictive, nor ferocious. On the contrary, they were thin, wasted, haggard, anxious beasts, economically equipped and gotten up, the

better to wrestle with a six months' drought, occasional famine, and the incessant buffeting of the wind—wild and untamable, but their staring eyes and nervous limbs expressed only wonder and curiosity. And when he ran toward them with a shout, they turned, as had the others, file by file, and rank by rank, and in a moment were, like the others, in full retreat. Rather, let me say, retreated as the others *had* retreated, for when he faced about again to retrace his steps toward the Mission, he fronted the bossy bucklers and inextricable horns of those he had driven only a few moments ago before him. They had availed themselves of his diversion with the rear guard to return.

With the rapidity of a quick intellect and swift perceptions, Arthur saw at once the resistless logic and utter hopelessness of his situation. The inevitable culmination of all this was only a question of time—and a very brief period. Would it be sufficient to enable him to reach the *casa?* No! Could he regain the *corral?* Perhaps. Between it and himself already were a thousand cattle.

Would they continue to retreat as he advanced? Possibly. But would he be overtaken meanwhile by those in his rear?

He answered the question himself by drawing from his waistcoat pocket his only weapon, a small "Derringer," and taking aim at the foremost bull. The shot took effect in the animal's shoulder, and he fell upon his knees. As Arthur had expected, his nearer comrades stopped and sniffed at their helpless companion. But, as Arthur had not expected, the eager crowd pressing behind overbore them and their wounded brother, and in another instant the unfortunate animal was prostrate and his life beaten out by the trampling hoofs of the resistless, blind, and eager crowd that followed. With a terrible intuition that it was a foreshadowing of his own fate, Arthur turned in the direction of the corral, and ran for his very life!

As he ran he was conscious that the act precipitated the inevitable catastrophe—but he could think of nothing better. As he ran, he felt, from the shaking of the earth beneath his feet, that the act had once more

put the whole herd in equally active motion behind him. As he ran, he noticed that the cattle before him retreated with something of his own precipitation. But as he ran, he thought of nothing but the awful fate that was following him, and the thought spurred him to an almost frantic effort. I have tried to make the reader understand that Arthur was quite inaccessible to any of those weaknesses which mankind regard as physical cowardice. In the defence of what he believed to be an intellectual truth, in the interests of his pride or his self-love, or in a moment of passion, he would have faced death with unbroken fortitude and calmness. But to be the victim of an accident; to be the lamentable sequel of a logical succession of chances, without motive or purpose; to be sacrificed for nothing—without proving or disproving anything; to be trampled to death by idiotic beasts, who had not even the instincts of passion or revenge to justify them; to die the death of an ignorant tramp, or any negligent clown—a death that had a ghastly ludicrousness in its method, a death that would

leave his body a shapeless, indistinguishable, unrecognisable clod, which affection could not idealize nor friendship reverence,—all this brought a horror with it so keen, so exquisite, so excruciating, that the fastidious, proud, intellectual being fleeing from it might have been the veriest dastard that ever turned his back on danger. And superadded to it was a superstitious thought that for its very horror, perhaps it was a retribution for something that he dared not contemplate!

And it was then that his strength suddenly flagged. His senses began to reel. His breath, which had kept pace with the quick beating of his heart, intermitted, hesitated, was lost! Above the advancing thunder of hoofs behind him, he thought he heard a woman's voice. He knew now he was going crazy; he shouted and fell; he rose again and staggered forward a few steps and fell again. It was over now! A sudden sense of some strange, subtle perfume, beating up through the acrid, smarting dust of the plain, that choked his mouth and blinded his eyes, came swooning over

him. And then the blessed interposition of unconsciousness and peace.

He struggled back to life again with the word "Philip" in his ears, a throbbing brow, and the sensation of an effort to do something that was required of him. Of all his experience of the last few moments only the perfume remained. He was lying alone in the dry bed of the *arroyo;* on the bank a horse was standing, and above him bent the dark face and darker eyes of Donna Dolores.

"Try to recover sufficient strength to mount that horse," she said, after a pause.

It was a woman before him. With that innate dread which all masculine nature has of exhibiting physical weakness before a weaker sex, Arthur struggled to rise without the assistance offered by the small hand of his friend. That, however, even at that crucial moment, he so far availed himself of it, as to press it, I fear was the fact.

"You came to my assistance alone?" asked Arthur, as he struggled to his feet.

"Why not? We are equal now, Don Arturo," said Donna Dolores, with a dazzling

smile. "I saw you from my window. You were rash — pardon me — foolish! The oldest vanquero never ventures afoot upon these plains. But come; you shall ride with me. There was no time to saddle another horse, and I thought you would not care to let others know of your adventure! Am I right?"

There was a slight dimple of mischief in her cheek, and a quaint sparkle in her dark eye, as she turned her questioning gaze on Arthur. He caught her hand and raised it respectfully to his lips.

"You are wise as you are brave, Donna Dolores."

"We shall see. But at present you must believe that I am right, and do as I say. Mount that horse—I will help you if you are too weak—and—leave a space for me behind you!"

Thus adjured, Arthur leaped into the saddle. If his bones had been broken instead of being bruised, he would still have found strength for that effort. In another instant Donna Dolores' little foot rested on his, and she lightly mounted behind him.

"Home now. Hasten; we will be there before any one will know it," she said, as she threw one arm around his waist, with superb unconsciousness.

Arthur lifted the rein and dropped his heels into the flanks of the horse. In five minutes—the briefest, as it seemed to him, he had ever passed—they were once more within the walls of the Blessed Trinity.

BOOK IV.

DRIFTING.

CHAPTER I.

MR. AND MRS. CONROY AT HOME.

THE manner in which One Horse Gulch received the news of Gabriel Conroy's marriage was characteristic of that frank and outspoken community. Without entering upon the question of his previous shameless flirtation with Mrs. Markle—the baleful extent of which was generally unknown to the camp—the nearer objections were based upon the fact that the bride was a stranger and consequently an object of suspicion, and that Gabriel's sphere of usefulness in a public philanthropic capacity would be seriously impaired and limited. His very brief courtship did not excite any surprise in a climate where the harvest so promptly followed the sowing, and the fact, now generally known, that it was he who saved the woman's life after the

breaking of the dam at Black Cañon, was accepted as a sufficient reason for his success in that courtship. It may be remarked here that a certain grim disbelief in feminine coyness obtained at One Horse Gulch. That the conditions of life there were as near the perfect and original condition of mankind as could be found anywhere, and that the hollow shams of society and weak artifices of conventionalism could not exist in that sincere atmosphere, were two beliefs that One Horse Gulch never doubted.

Possibly there was also some little envy of Gabriel's success, an envy not based upon any evidence of his superior courage, skill, or strength, but only of the peculiar "luck," opportunity, or providence, that had enabled him to turn certain qualities very common to One Horse Gulch to such favourable account.

"Toe think," said Jo. Briggs, "thet I was allowin'—only thet very afternoon—to go up that cañon arter game, and didn't go from some derned foolishness or other, and yer's Gabe, hevin' no call to go thar, jest comes along, accidental like, and, dern my

skin! but he strikes onto a purty gal and a wife the first lick!"

"Thet's so," responded Barker, "it's all luck. Thar's thet Cy. Dudley, with plenty o' money and wantin' a wife bad, and ez is goin' to Sacramento to-morrow to prospect fur one, and he hez been up and down that cañon time outer mind, and no dam ever said 'break' to him! No, sir! Or take my own case; on'y last week when the Fiddletown coach went over the bank at Dry Creek, wasn't I the fust man thar ez cut the leaders adrift and bruk open the coach-door and helped out the passengers? And wot passengers? Six Chinymen by Jinks—and a Greaser! Thet's my luck!"

There were few preliminaries to the marriage. The consent of Olly was easily gained. As an act of aggression and provocation toward Mrs. Markle, nothing could offer greater inducements. The superior gentility of the stranger, the fact of her being a stranger, and the expeditiousness of the courtship coming so hard upon Mrs. Markle's fickleness commended itself to the child's sense of justice and feminine retalia-

tion. For herself, Olly hardly knew if she liked her prospective sister; she was gentle, she was kind, she seemed to love Gabriel—but Olly was often haunted by a vague instinct that Mrs. Markle would have been a better match—and with true feminine inconsistency she hated her the more for it. Possibly she tasted also something of the disappointment of the baffled match-maker in the depths of her childish consciousness.

It may be fairly presumed that the former Mrs. Devarges had confided to no one but her lawyer the secret of her assumption of the character of Grace Conroy. How far or how much more she had confided to that gentleman was known only to himself; he kept her secret, whatever might have been its extent, and received the announcement of her intended marriage to Gabriel with the superior smile of one to whom all things are possible from the unprofessional sex.

"Now that you are about to enter into actual possession," said Mr. Maxwell, quietly buttoning up his pocket again, "I

suppose you will not require my services immediately."

It is said, upon what authority I know not, that Madame Devarges blushed slightly, heaved the least possible sigh as she shook her head and said, "I hope not," with an evident sincerity that left her legal adviser in some slight astonishment.

How far her intended husband participated in this confidence I do not know. He was evidently proud of alluding to her in the few brief days of his courtship as the widow of the "great Doctor Devarges," and his knowledge of her former husband to some extent mitigated in the public mind the apparent want of premeditation in the courtship.

"To think of the artfulness of that man," said Sal, confidentially, to Mrs. Markle, "and he a-gettin' up sympathy about his sufferin's at Starvation Camp, and all the while a-carryin' on with the widder of one o' them onfortunets. No wonder that man was queer! Wot you allowed in the innocents o' yer heart was bashfulness

was jest conscience. I never let on to ye, Mrs. Markle, but I allus noticed thet thet Gabe never could meet my eye."

The flippant mind might have suggested that as both of Miss Sarah's eyes were afflicted with a cast, there might have been a physical impediment to this exchange of frankness, but then the flippant mind never enjoyed the confidence of this powerful young woman.

It was a month after the wedding, and Mrs. Markle was sitting alone in her parlour, whither she had retired after the professional duties of supper were over, when the front door opened, and Sal entered. It was Sunday evening, and Sal had been enjoying the brief recreation of gossip with the neighbours, and, as was alleged by the flippant mind before alluded to, some coquettish conversation and dalliance with certain youth of One Horse Gulch.

Mrs. Markle watched her handmaid slowly remove an immense straw "flat" trimmed with tropical flowers, and then proceed to fold away an enormous plaid shawl which represented quite another zone,

and then her curiosity got the better of her prudence.

"Well, and how did ye find the young couple gettin' on, Sal?"

Sal too well understood the value of coyly-withheld information to answer at once, and with the instincts of a true artist, she affected to misunderstand her mistress. When Mrs. Markle had repeated her question Sal replied, with a sarcastic laugh—

"Axin yer pardin fur manners, but you let on about the *young* couple, and *she* forty if she's anythin'."

"Oh, no, Sal," remonstrated Mrs. Markle, with reproachful accents, and yet a certain self-satisfaction; "you're mistaken, sure."

"Well," said Sal, breathlessly slapping her hands on her lap, "if pearl powder and another woman's har and fancy doin's beggiles folks, it ain't Sal ez is among the folks fooled. No, Sue Markle. Ef I ain't lived long enough with a woman ez owns to thirty-three and hez—ef it wuz my last words and God is my jedge—the neck and arms of a gal of sixteen, not to know when

a woman is trying to warm over the scraps of forty year with a kind o' hash o' twenty, then Sal Clark ain't got no eyes, thet's all."

Mrs. Markle blushed slightly under the direct flattery of Sal, and continued—

"Some folks says she's purty."

"Some men's meat is other men's pizen," responded Sal, sententiously, unfastening an enormous black velvet zone, and apparently permitting her figure to fall into instant ruin.

"How did they look?" said Mrs. Markle, after a pause, recommencing her darning, which she had put down.

"Well, purty much as I allowed they would from the first. Thar ain't any love wasted over thar. My opinion is thet he's sick of his barg'in. She runs the house and ev'ry thing that's in it. Jest look at the critter! She's just put that thar Gabe up to prospecting all along the ledge here, and that fool's left his diggin's and hez been running hither and yon, making ridiklus holes all over the hill jest to satisfy thet woman, and she ain't satisfied neither.

Take my word for it, Sue Markle, thar's suthin' wrong thar. And then thar's thet Olly——"

Mrs. Markle raised her eyes quickly, and put down her work. "Olly," she repeated, with great animation—"poor little Olly! what's gone of her?"

"Well," said Sal, with an impatient toss of her head, "I never did see what thar wuz in that peart and sassy piece for any one to take to—leastwise a woman with a child of her own. The airs and graces thet thet Olly would put on wuz too much. Why, she hedn't been nigh us for a month, and the day afore the wedding what does that limb do but meet me and sez, sez she, 'Sal, ye kin tell Mrs. Markle as my brother Gabe ez goin' to marry a lady—a lady,' sez she. 'Thar ain't goin' to be enny Pikes about our cabin.' And thet child only eight years! Oh, git out thar! I ain't no patience!"

To the infinite credit of a much abused sex, be it recorded that Mrs. Markle overlooked the implied slur, and asked—

"But what about Olly?"

"I mean to say," said Sal, "thet thet child hain't no place in thet house, and thet Gabe is jest thet weak and mean spirited ez to let thet woman have her own way. No wonder thet the child was crying when I met her out in the woods yonder."

Mrs. Markle instantly flushed, and her black eyes snapped ominously. "I should jest like to ketch—" she began quickly, and then stopped and looked at her companion. "Sal," she said, with swift vehemence, "I must see thet child."

"How?"

The word in Sal's dialect had a various, large, and catholic significance. Mrs. Markle understood it, and repeated briefly—

"Olly—I must see her—right off!"

"Which?" continued Sal.

"Here," replied Mrs. Markle; "anywhere. Fetch her when you kin."

"She wont come."

"Then I'll go to her," said Mrs. Markle, with a sudden and characteristic determination that closed the conversation, and

sent Sal back viciously to her unwashed dishes.

Whatever might have been the truth of Sal's report, there was certainly no general external indication of the facts. The newly married couple were, to all appearances, as happy and contented, and as enviable to the masculine inhabitants of One Horse Gulch as any who had ever built a nest within its pastoral close. If a majority of Gabriel's visitors were gentlemen, it was easily attributed to the preponderance of males in the settlement. If these gentlemen were unanimously extravagant in their praise of Mrs. Conroy, it was as easily attributable to the same cause. That Gabriel should dig purposeless holes over the hillside, that he should for the time abandon his regular occupation in his little modest claim in the cañon, was quite consistent with the ambition of a newly-married man.

A few evenings after this, Gabriel Conroy was sitting alone by the hearth of that new house, which popular opinion and the tastes of Mrs. Conroy seemed to think was essential to his new condition. It was a larger, more

ambitious, more expensive, and perhaps less comfortable dwelling than the one in which he has been introduced to the reader. It was projected upon that credit which a man of family was sure to obtain in One Horse Gulch, where the immigration and establishment of families and household centres were fostered even at pecuniary risks. It contained, besides the chambers, the gratuitous addition of a parlour, which at this moment was adorned and made attractive by the presence of Mrs. Conroy, who was entertaining a few visitors that, under her attractions, had prolonged their sitting until late. When the laugh had ceased and the door closed on the last lingering imbecile, Mrs. Conroy returned to the sitting-room. It was dark, for Gabriel had not lighted a candle yet, and he was occupying his favourite seat and attitude before the fire.

"Why! are *you* there?" said Mrs. Conroy, gaily.

Gabriel looked up, and with that seriousness which was habitual to him, replied—

"Yes."

Mrs. Conroy approached her lord and

master, and ran her thin, claw-like fingers through his hair with married audacity. He caught them, held them for a moment with a kindly, caressing, and yet slightly embarrassed air that the lady did not like. She withdrew them quickly.

"Why didn't you come into the parlour?" she said, examining him curiously.

"I didn't admire to to-night," returned Gabriel, with grave simplicity, "and I reckoned you'd get on as well without me."

There was not the slightest trace of bitterness nor aggrieved sensitiveness in his tone or manner, and although Mrs. Conroy eyed him sharply for any latent spark of jealousy, she was forced to admit to herself that it did not exist in the quiet, serious man before her. Vaguely aware of some annoyance in his wife's face, Gabriel reached out his arm, and, lightly taking her around her waist, drew her to his knee. But the very act was so evidently a recognition of a certain kind of physical and moral weakness in the creature before him—so professional—so, as Mrs. Conroy put it to herself,—"like as if I were a sick man,"

that her irritation was not soothed. She rose quickly and seated herself on the other side of the fireplace. With the same implied toleration Gabriel had already displayed, he now made no attempt to restrain her.

Mrs. Conroy did not pout as another woman might have done. She only smiled a haggard smile that deepened the line of her nostril into her cheek, and pinched her thin, straight nose. Then she said, looking at the fire—

"Ain't you well?"

"I reckon not—not overly well."

There was a silence, both looking at the fire.

"You don't get anything out of that hillside?" asked Mrs. Conroy at last, pettishly.

"No," said Gabriel.

"You have prospected all over the ridge?" continued the woman impatiently.

"All over!"

"And you don't find anything?"

"Nothin'," said Gabriel. "Nary. Thet is," he added with his usual cautious deliberation, "thet is, nothin' o' any account.

The gold, ef there is any, lies lower down in the gulch, whar I used to dig. But I kept at it jest to satisfy your whim. You know, July, it *was* a whim of yours," he continued, with a certain gentle deprecatoriness of manner.

A terrible thought flashed suddenly upon Mrs. Conroy. Could Dr. Devarges have made a mistake? Might he not have been delirious or insane when he wrote of the treasure? Or had the Secretary deceived her as to its location? A swift and sickening sense that all she had gained, or was to gain, from her scheme, was the man before her—and that *he* did not love her as other men had—asserted itself through her trembling consciousness. Mrs. Conroy had already begun to fear that she loved this husband, and it was with a new sense of yearning and dependence that she in her turn looked deprecatingly and submissively into his face and said—

"It *was* only a whim, dear—I dare say a foolish one. It's gone now. Don't mind it!"

"I don't," said Gabriel, simply.

Mrs. Conroy winced.

"I thought you looked disappointed," she said after a pause.

"It ain't that I was thinkin' on, July; it's Olly," said Gabriel.

There is a limit even to a frightened woman's submission.

"Of course," she said, sharply; "Olly, Olly again and always. I ought to have remembered that."

"Thet's so," said Gabriel with the same exasperating quiet. "I was reckonin' jest now, ez there don't seem to be any likeliness of you and Olly's gettin' on together, you'd better separate. Thar ain't no sense goin' on this way, July—no sense et all. And the worst o' the hull thing ez thet Olly ain't gettin' no kinder good outer it, no way!"

Mrs. Conroy was very pale and dangerously quiet as Mr. Conroy went on.

"I've allers allowed to send that child to school, but she don't keer to go. She's thet foolish, thet Olly is, thet she doesn't like to leave me, and I reckon I'm thet foolish too thet I don't like to hev her go. The only way to put things square ez this——"

Mrs. Conroy turned and fixed her grey eyes upon her husband, but she did not speak.

"You'd better go away," continued Gabriel, quietly, "for a while. I've heerd afore now that it's the reg'lar thing fur a bride to go away and visit her mother. You hain't got no mother," said Gabriel thoughtfully, "hev ye?—that's bad. But you was a sayin' the other day suthin' about some business you had down at 'Frisco. Now it would be about the nateral sort o' thing for ye to go thar fur two or three months, jest till things get round square with Olly and me."

It is probable that Gabriel was the only man from whom Mrs. Conroy could have received this humiliating proposition without interrupting him with a burst of indignation. Yet she only turned a rigid face toward the fire again with a hysterical laugh.

"Why limit my stay to two or three months?" she said.

"Well, it might be four," said Gabriel, simply—"it would give me and Olly a longer time to get things in shape."

Mrs. Conroy rose and walked rigidly to her husband's side.

"What," she said huskily, "what if I were to refuse?"

Gabriel looked as if this suggestion would not have been startling or inconsistent as an abstract possibility in woman, but said nothing.

"What," continued Mrs. Conroy, more rapidly and huskily, "what if I were to tell *you* and that brat to go! What," she said, suddenly raising her voice to a thin, high soprano, "what if I were to turn you both out of this house—*my* house! off this land—*my* land! Eh? eh? eh?" she almost screamed, emphasizing each interrogatory with her thin hand on Gabriel's shoulder, in a desperate but impotent attempt to shake him.

"Certingly, certingly," said Gabriel, calmly. "But thar's somebody at the door, July," he continued quietly, as he rose slowly and walked into the hall.

His quick ear had detected a knocking without above the truculent pitch of Mrs. Conroy's voice. He threw open the door,

and disclosed Olly and Sal standing upon the threshold.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Sal was first to recover the use of that noble organ, the tongue.

"With chills and ager in every breath—it's an hour if it's five minutes that we've stood here," she began, "pounding at that door. 'You're interrupting the young couple, Sal,' sez I, 'comin' yer this time o' night, breakin' in, so to speak, on the holiest confidences,' sez I; 'but it's business, and onless you hev thet to back you, Sarah Clark,' I sez, 'and you ain't a woman ez ever turned her back on thet or them, you ain't no call there.' But I was to fetch this child home, Mrs. Conroy," continued Sal, pushing her way into the little sitting-room, "and——"

She paused, for the room was vacant. Mrs. Conroy had disappeared.

"I thought I heerd——" said Sal, completely taken aback.

"It was only Gabe," said Olly, with the ready mendacity of swift feminine tact. "I told you so. Thank you, Sal, for seeing me

home. Good night, Sal," and with a dexterity that smote Gabriel into awesome and admiring silence, she absolutely led the breathless Sal to the door and closed it upon her before that astonished female could recover her speech.

Then she returned quietly, took off her hat and shawl, and taking the unresisting hand of her brother, led him back to his former seat by the fire. Drawing a low stool in front of him, she proceeded to nestle between his knees—an old trick of hers—and, once more taking his hand, stroked it between her brown fingers, looked up into his face, and said—

"Dear old Gabe!"

The sudden smile that irradiated Gabriel's serious face would have been even worse provocation to Mrs. Conroy than his previous conduct.

"What was the matter, Gabe?" said Olly; "what was she saying when we came in?"

Gabriel had not, since the entrance of his sister, thought of Mrs. Conroy's parting speech and manner. Even now its full

significance did not appear to have reached him.

"I disremember, Olly," he replied, looking down into Olly's earnest eyes, "suthin' or other; she was techy, thet's all."

"But wot did she mean by saying that the house and lands was hers?" persisted the child.

"Married folks, Olly," said Gabriel, with the lazy, easy manner of vast matrimonial experience, "married folks hev little jokes and ways o' thar own. Bein' onmarried yourself, ye don't know. 'With all my worldly goods I thee endow,' thet's all—thet's what she meant, Olly. 'With all my worldly goods I thee endow.' Did you hev a good time down there?"

"Yes," said Olly.

"You'll hev a nice time here soon, Olly," said Gabriel.

Olly looked incredulously across the hall toward the door of Mrs. Conroy's chamber.

"Thet's it, Olly," said Gabriel, "Mrs. Conroy's goin' to Frisco to see some friends. She's thet bent on goin' thet nothin' 'ill stop her. Ye see, Olly, it's the fashion fur new

married folks to kinder go way and visit absent and sufferin' friends. Thar's them little ways about the married state, that, bein' onmarried yourself, you don't sabe. But it's all right, she's goin'. Bein' a lady, and raised, so to speak, 'mong fashi'n'ble people, she's got to folly the fashi'n. She's goin' for three months, mebbe four. I disremember now wot's the fashi'n'ble time. But she'll do it, Olly."

Olly cast a penetrating look at her brother.

"She ain't goin' on my account, Gabe?"

"Lord love the child, no! Wot put thet into your head, Olly? Why," said Gabriel with cheerful mendacity, "she's been takin' a shine to ye o' late. On'y to-night, she was wonderin' whar you be."

As if to give credence to his words, and much to his inward astonishment, the door of Mrs. Conroy's room opened, and the lady herself, with a gracious smile on her lips and a brightly beaming eye, albeit somewhat reddened around the lids, crossed the hall, and, going up to Olly, kissed her round cheek.

"I thought it was your voice, and, although I was just going to bed," she added gaily, with a slightly apologetic look at her charming dishabille, "I had to come in and be sure it was you. And where have you been, you naughty girl? Do you know I shall be dreadfully jealous of this Mrs. Markle. Come and tell me all about her. Come. You shall stay with me to-night, and we won't let brother Gabe hear our little secrets—shall we? Come!"

And before the awe-struck Gabriel could believe his own senses she had actually whisked the half-pleased, half-frightened child into her own room, and he was left standing alone. Nor was he the less amazed, although relieved of a certain undefined anxiety for the child, when, a moment later, Olly herself thrust her curly head out of the door, and, calling out, "Good-night, old Gabe," with a mischievous accent, shut and locked the door in his face. For a moment Gabriel stood petrified on his own hearthstone. Was he mistaken, and had Mrs. Conroy's anger actually been nothing but a joke? Was Olly really sincere in her

dislike of his wife? There was but one apparent solution to these various and perplexing problems, and that was the general incomprehensibility of the sex.

"The ways o' women is awful onsartin," said Gabriel, as he sought the solitary little room which had been set apart for Olly, "and somehow I ain't the man ez hez the gift o' findin' them out."

And with these reflections he went apologetically, yet, to a certain extent, contentedly, as was his usual habit, to bed.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH THE TREASURE IS FOUND—AND LOST.

AS no word has been handed down of the conversation that night between Olly and her sister-in-law, I fear the masculine reader must view their subsequent conduct in the light of Gabriel's abstract proposition. The feminine reader—to whose well-known sense of justice and readiness to acknowledge a characteristic weakness, I chiefly commend these pages—will of course require no further explanation, and will be quite ready to believe that the next morning Olly and Mrs. Conroy were apparently firm friends, and that Gabriel was incontinently snubbed by both of these ladies as he deserved.

"You don't treat July right," said Olly, one morning, to Gabriel, during five minutes

that she had snatched from the inseparable company of Mrs. Conroy.

Gabriel opened his eyes in wonder. "I hain't been 'round the house much, because I allowed you and July didn't want my kempany," he began apologetically, "and ef it's shortness of provisions, I've fooled away so much time, Olly, in prospectin' that ledge that I had no time to clar up and get any dust. I reckon, may be, the pork bar'l *is* low. But I'll fix thet straight soon, Olly, soon."

"But it ain't thet, Gabe—it ain't provisions—it's—it's—O! you ain't got no sabe ez a husband—thar!" burst out the direct Olly at last.

Without the least sign of resentment, Gabriel looked thoughtfully at his sister.

"Thet's so—I reckon thet *is* the thing. Not hevin' been married afore, and bein', so to speak, strange and green-handed, like as not I don't exactly come up to the views of a woman ez hez hed thet experience. And her husband a savang! a savang! Olly, and a larned man."

"You're as good as him!" ejaculated

Olly, hastily, whose parts of speech were less accurately placed than her feelings, "and I reckon she loves you a heap better, Gabe. But you ain't quite lovin' enough," she added, as Gabriel started. "Why, thar was thet young couple thet came up from Simpson's last week and stayed over at Mrs. Markle's. Thar was no end of the attentions thet thet man paid to thet thar woman —fixin' her shawl, histin' the winder and puttin' it down, and askin' after her health every five minnits—and they'd sit and sit, just like this"—here Olly, in the interests of domestic felicity, improvised the favourite attitude of the bridegroom as far as the great girth of Gabriel's waist and chest could be "clipped" by her small arms.

"Wot! afore folks?" asked Gabriel, looking down a little shamefully on the twining arms of his sister.

"Yes—in course—afore folks. Why, they want it to be known that they're married."

"Olly," broke out Gabriel, desperately, "your sister-in-law ain't thet kind of a

woman. She'd reckon thet kind o' thing was low."

But Olly only replied by casting a mischievous look at her brother, shaking her curls, and with the mysterious admonition "Try it!" left him, and went back to Mrs. Conroy.

Happily for Gabriel, Mrs. Conroy did not offer an opportunity for the exhibition of any tenderness on Gabriel's part. Although she did not make any allusion to the past, and even utterly ignored any previous quarrel, she still preserved a certain coy demeanour toward him, that, while it relieved him of an onerous duty, very greatly weakened his faith in the infallibility of Olly's judgment. When, out of respect to that judgment, he went so far as to throw his arms ostentatiously around his wife's waist, one Sunday, while perambulating the single long public street of One Horse Gulch, and that lady, with great decision, quietly slipped out of his embrace, he doubted still more.

"I did it on account o' wot you said, Olly, and darn my skin if she seemed to like

it at all, and even the boys hangin' around seemed to think it was queer. Jo Hobson snickered right out."

"When was it?" said Olly.

"Sunday."

Olly, sharply—"Where?"

Gabriel—"On Main Street."

Olly, apostrophizing heaven with her blue eyes—"Ef thar ever was a blunderin' mule, Gabe, it's YOU!"

Gabriel, mildly and thoughtfully—"Thet's so."

Howbeit, some kind of a hollow truce was patched up between these three belligerents, and Mrs. Conroy did not go to San Francisco on business. It is presumed that the urgency of her affairs there was relieved by correspondence, for during the next two weeks she expressed much anxiety on the arrival of the regular tri-weekly mails. And one day it brought her not only a letter, but an individual of some importance in this history.

He got down from the Wingdam coach amid considerable local enthusiasm. Apart from the fact that it was well known that he

was a rich San Francisco banker and capitalist, his brusque, sharp energy, his easy, sceptical familiarity and general contempt for and ignoring of everything but the practical and material, and, above all, his reputation for success, which seemed to make that success a wholesome business principle rather than good fortune, had already fascinated the passengers who had listened to his curt speech and half oracular axioms. They had forgiven dogmatisms voiced in such a hearty manner, and emphasized possibly with a slap on the back of the listener. He had already converted them to his broad materialism—less, perhaps, by his curt rhetoric than by the logic of his habitual business success, and the respectability that it commanded. It was easy to accept scepticism from a man who evidently had not suffered by it. Radicalism and democracy are much more fascinating to us when the apostle is in comfortable case and easy circumstances, than when he is clad in fustian, and consistently out of a situation. Human nature thirsts for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but

would prefer to receive it from the happy owner of a latch-key to the Garden of Eden, rather than from the pilferer who had just been ejected from the premises.

It is probable, however, that the possessor of these admirable qualities had none of that fine scorn for a mankind accessible to this weakness which at present fills the breast of the writer, and, I trust, the reader of these pages. If he had, I doubt if he would have been successful. Like a true hero, he was quite unconscious of the quality of his heroism, and utterly unable to analyse it. So that, without any previous calculations or pre-arranged plan, he managed to get rid of his admirers, and apply himself to the business he had in hand without either wilfully misleading the public of One Horse Gulch, or giving the slightest intimation of what that real business was. That the general interests of One Horse Gulch had attracted the attention of this powerful capitalist—that he intended to erect a new Hotel or "start" an independent line of stage-coaches from Sacramento, were among the accepted theories. Everybody offered

him vast and gratuitous information, and out of the various facts and theories submitted to him, he gained the particular knowledge he required without asking for it. Given, a reputation for business shrewdness and omnipresence in any one individual, and the world will speedily place him beyond the necessity of using them.

And so in a casual, general way, the stranger was shown over the Length and Breadth and Thickness and Present and Future of One Horse Gulch. When he had reached the further extremity of the Gulch he turned to his escort—"I'll make the inquiry you ask now."

"How?"

"By telegraph—if you'll take it."

He tore a leaf from a memorandum-book and wrote a few lines.

"And you?"

"Oh, I'll look around here—I suppose there's not much beyond this?"

"No; the next claim is Gabriel Conroy's."

"Not much account, I reckon?"

"No? It pays him grub!"

"Well, dine with me at three o'clock, when and where you choose—you know best. Invite whom you like. Good-bye!" and the great man's escort, thus dismissed, departed, lost in admiration of the decisive promptitude and liberality of his guest.

Left to himself, the stranger turned his footsteps in the direction of Gabriel Conroy's claim. Had he been an admirer of Nature, or accessible to any of those influences which a contemplation of wild scenery is apt to produce in weaker humanity, he would have been awed by the gradual transition of a pastoral landscape to one of uncouth heroics. In a few minutes he had left the belt of sheltering pines and entered upon the ascent of a shadowless, scorched, and blistered mountain, that here and there in places of vegetation had put on the excrescences of scoria, or a singular eruption of crust, that, breaking beneath his feet in slippery grey powder, made his footing difficult and uncertain. Had he been possessed of a scientific eye, he would have noted here and there the evidences of volcanic action, in the sudden depressions, the abrupt eleva-

tions, the marks of disruption and upheaval, and the river-like flow of débris that protruded a black tongue into the valley below. But I am constrained to believe that the stranger's dominant impression was simply one of heat. Half-way up the ascent he took off his coat and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. Nevertheless, certain peculiarities in his modes of progression showed him to be not unfamiliar with mountain travel. Two or three times during the ascent he stopped, and, facing about, carefully re-surveyed the path beneath him. Slight as was the action, it was the unfailing sign of the mountaineer, who recognised that the other side of a mountain was as yet an undetermined quantity, and was prepared to retrace his steps if necessary. At the summit he paused and looked around him.

Immediately at his feet the Gulch which gave its name to the settlement, and from which the golden harvest was gathered, broadened into a thickly wooded valley. Its quivering depths were suffused by the incense of odorous gums and balms liberated

by the fierce heat of the noonday sun that rose to his face in soft, tremulous waves and filled the air with its heated spices. Through a gap in the cañon to the west, a faint, scarcely distinguishable line of cloud indicated the Coast Range. North and south, higher hills arose, heavily terraced with straight colonnades of pines, that made the vast black monolith on which he stood appear blacker and barer by contrast. Higher hills to the east—one or two peaks—and between them in the sunlight odd-looking, indistinct, vacant intervals—blanks in the landscape as yet not filled in with colour or expression. Yet the stranger knew them to be snow, and for a few moments seemed fascinated—gazing at them with a fixed eye and rigid mouth, until, with an effort, he tore himself away.

Scattered over the summit were numerous holes that appeared to have been recently sunk. In one of them the stranger picked up a fragment of the crumbled rock and examined it carelessly. Then he slowly descended the gentler slope toward the west, in the direction of a claim wherein his quick

eye had discovered a man at work. A walk of a few moments brought him to the bank of red clay, the heap of tailings, the wooden sluice-box, and the pan and shovel which constituted the appurtenances of an ordinary claim. As he approached nearer, the workman rose from the bank over which he was bending, and leaning on his pick, turned his face to the new-comer. His broad, athletic figure, his heavy blonde beard, and serious, perplexed eyes, were unmistakable. It was Gabriel Conroy.

"How are ye?" said the stranger, briskly extending a hand which Gabriel took mechanically. "You're looking well! Recollect *you*, but you don't recollect me. Eh?" He laughed curtly, in a fashion as short and businesslike as his speech, and then fixed his eyes rather impatiently on the hesitating Gabriel.

Gabriel could only stare, and struggle with a tide of thick-coming remembrances. He looked around him; the sun was beating down on the old familiar objects, everything was unchanged—and yet this face, this voice—

"I am here on a matter of business," continued the stranger briskly, dismissing the question of recognition as one unessential to the business on hand—"and—what have you got to propose?" He leaned lightly against the bank and supported himself by thrusting Gabriel's pickaxe against the bank, as he waited a reply.

"It's Peter Dumphy," said Gabriel, in an awe-stricken voice.

"Yes. You recollect me now! Thought you would. It's five years and over—ain't it? Rough times them, Gabriel—warn't they? Eh! But *you're* lookin' well—doin' well, too. Hey? Well—what do you propose to do about this claim? Haven't made up your mind—hey? Come then—I'll make a proposition. First I suppose your title's all right, hey?"

It was so evident from Gabriel's dazed manner, that apart from his astonishment at meeting Peter Dumphy, he did not know what he was talking about, that Dumphy paused.

"It's about these specimens," he added,

eyeing Gabriel keenly, "the specimens you sent me."

"Wot specimens?" said Gabriel, vaguely, still lost in the past.

"The ones your wife sent me,—all the same thing, you know."

"But it ain't," said Gabriel, with his old truthful directness. "You better talk to her 'bout thet. Thet's her look out. I reckon now she *did* say suthin'," continued Gabriel, meditatively, "about sendin' rock to Frisco to be tested, but I didn't somehow get to take an interest in it. Leastways it's her funeral. You'd better see her."

It was Mr. Dumphy's turn to be perplexed. In his perfect misapprehension of the character of the man before him, he saw only skilful business evasion under the guise of simplicity. He remembered, moreover, that in the earlier days of his prosperity as Dumphy and Jenkins, Commission Merchants, he was himself in the habit of referring customers with whom he was not ready to treat, to Jenkins, very much as

he had just now been referred to Mrs. Conroy.

"Of course," he said, briskly; "only I thought I'd save time, which is short with me to-day, by coming directly to you. May not have time to see her. But you can write."

"Thet's so," said Gabriel, "p'r'aps it's just as well in the long run. Ef ye don't see her, she'll know it ain't your fault. I'll let on that much to her." And having disposed of this unimportant feature of the interview, he continued, "Ye haven't heard naught o' Grace—ye mind Grace? Dumphy! —a purty little girl ez was with me up thar. Ye ain't heerd anything o' her—nor seen her, may be—hev you?"

Of course this question at such a moment was to Mr. Dumphy susceptible of only one meaning. It was that Mrs. Conroy had confessed everything to Gabriel, and that he wished to use Dumphy's complicity in the deceit as a lever in future business transactions. Mr. Dumphy felt he had to deal with two consummate actors—one of whom

was a natural hypocrite. For the first time in his life he was impatient of evil. We never admire truth and sincerity so highly as when we find it wanting in an adversary.

"Ran off with some fellow, didn't she? Yes, I remember. You won't see her again. It's just as well for you! I'd call her dead, anyway."

Although Dumphy was convinced that Gabriel's interest in the fate of his sister was hypocritical, he was not above a Christian hope that this might wound a brother's feelings. He turned to go.

"Can't you come back this way and hev a little talk about ol' times?" said Gabriel, warming toward Dumphy under the magic of old associations, and ignoring with provoking unconsciousness the sting of his last speech. "There's Olly ez 'ud jest admire to see ye. Ye mind Olly?—the baby, Grace's little sister, growed a fine likely gal now. See yer," continued Gabriel with sudden energy, putting down his pick and shovel, "I'll jess go over thar with ye now."

"No! no!" said Dumphy quickly. "Busy! Can't! 'Nother time! Good-day; see you again some time. So long!" and he hurriedly departed, retracing his steps until the claim and its possessor were lost in the intervening foliage.

Then he paused, hesitated, and then, striking across the summit of the hill, made his way boldly to Gabriel's cottage.

Either Mrs. Conroy was expecting him, or had detected him coming through the woods, for she opened the door to him and took him into her little parlour with a graciousness of demeanour and an elaboration of toilet that would have been dangerous to any other man. But, like most men with a deservedly bad reputation among women, Mr. Dumphy always rigidly separated any weakness of gallantry from his business.

"Here only for a few moments. Sorry can't stay longer. You're looking well!" said Mr. Dumphy.

Mrs. Conroy said she had not expected the pleasure of a personal interview; Mr. Dumphy must be *so* busy always.

"Yes. But I like to bring good news

myself. The specimens you sent have been assayed by first-class, reliable men. They'll do. No gold—but eighty per cent. silver. Hey! P'r'aps you expected it."

But Mr. Dumphy could see plainly from Mrs. Conroy's eager face that she had not expected it.

"Silver," she gasped—"eighty per cent!"

He was mystified, but relieved. It was evident that she had not consulted anybody else, and that he was first on the ground. So he said, curtly—

"What do you propose?"

"I don't know," began the lady. "I haven't thought ——"

"Exactly," interrupted Dumphy. "Haven't got any proposition. Excuse me — but" (taking out his watch) "time's nearly up. Look here. Eighty per cent.'s big thing! But Silver mine takes Gold mine to run it. All expense first — no profit till you get down. Works, smelting—cost twenty per cent. Here's my proposition. Put whole thing in joint-stock company. 100 shares. Five millions capital. You take fifty shares. I'll take twenty-five — dispose of other

twenty-five as I can. How's that? Hey? You can't say! Well—think of it!"

But all Mrs. Conroy could think of was two and a half millions! It stared at her, stretching in gigantic ciphers across the room. It blazed in golden letters on cheques —it rose on glittering piles of silver coin to the ceiling of the parlour. Yet she turned to him with a haggard face, and said—

"But this—this money—is only in prospective."

"Cash your draft for the sum ten minutes after the stock's issued. That's business."

With this certainty Mrs. Conroy recovered herself.

"I will talk—with—my husband," she said.

Mr. Dumphy smiled—palpably, openly, and shamelessly. Mrs. Conroy coloured quickly, but not from the consciousness Mr. Dumphy attributed to her, of detected cunning. She had begun to be ashamed of the position she believed she occupied in this man's eyes, and fearful that he should have discovered her husband's indifference to her.

"I've already seen him," said Mr. Dumphy, quietly.

The colour dropped from Mrs. Conroy's cheeks.

"He knows nothing of this," she said, faintly.

"Of course," said Dumphy, half contemptuously, "he said so; referred to you. That s all right. That's business."

"You did not tell him—you dared not ——" she said, excitedly.

Mr. Dumphy looked curiously at her for a moment. Then he rose and shut the door.

"Look here," he said, facing Mrs. Conroy in a hard matter-of-fact way, "do you mean to say that what that man—your husband—said, was true? That he knows nothing of you; of the circumstances under which you came here?"

"He does not—I swear to God he does not," she said, passionately.

It was inexplicable, but Mr. Dumphy believed her.

"But how will you explain this to him? You can do nothing without him."

"Why should *he* know more? If he has

discovered this mine, it is *his*—free of any gift of mine—as independent of any claim of mine as if we were strangers. The law makes him the owner of the mine that he discovers, no matter on whose land it may be found. In personating his sister, I only claimed a grant to the land. He has made the discovery which gives it its value! Even that sister," she added, with a sudden flash in her eyes—"even that sister, were she living, could not take it from him now!"

It was true! This woman, with whose weakness he had played, had outwitted them all, and slipped through their fingers, almost without stain or blemish. And in a way so simple! Duped as he had been, he could hardly restrain his admiration, and said, quite frankly and heartily—

"Good—that's business."

And then—ah me! this clever creature—this sharp adventuress, this Anonyma Victrix began to cry and to beg him not to tell *her husband!*

At this familiar sign of the universal feminine weakness Dumphy picked up his ears and arts again.

"Where's your proof that your husband is the first discoverer?" he said, curtly, but not unkindly. "Won't that paper that Dr. Devarges gave his sister show that the Doctor was really the discoverer of this lead?"

"Yes; but Dr. Devarges is dead, and I hold the paper."

"Good!" He took out his watch. "I've five minutes more. Now look here. I'm not going to say that you haven't managed this thing well—you have!—and that you can, if you like, get along without me!—you can! See! I'm not going to say that I went into this thing without the prospect of making something out of it myself. I have! That's business. The thing for you to consider now is this: understanding each other as we do, couldn't you push this thing through better with my help—and helping me—than to go elsewhere? Understand me! You could find a dozen men in San Francisco who would make you as good an offer and better! But it wouldn't be to their interest to keep down any unpleasant reminders of the past as it would be mine. You understand?"

Mrs. Conroy replied by extending her hand.

"To keep my secret from every one—from *him*," she said earnestly.

"Certainly—*that's* business!"

Then these two artful ones shook hands with a heartfelt and loyal admiration and belief for each other that I fear more honest folks might have profited by, and Mr. Dumphy went off to dine.

As Mrs. Conroy closed the front door Olly came running in from the back piazza. Mrs. Conroy caught her in her arms and discharged her pent-up feelings, and, let us hope, her penitence, in a joyful and passionate embrace. But Olly struggled to extricate herself. When at last she got her head free, she said, angrily—

"Let me go. I want to see him."

"Who—Mr. Dumphy?" asked Mrs. Conroy, still holding the child, with a half-hysterical laugh.

"Yes. Gabe said he was here. Let me go, I say!"

"What do you want with him?" asked her captor, with shrill gaiety.

"Gabe says—Gabe says—let me go, will you? Gabe says he knew ——"

"Whom?"

"My dear, dear sister Grace! There! I didn't mean to hurt you—but I must go!"

And she did, leaving the prospective possessor of Two and a Half Millions, vexed, suspicious, and alone.

CHAPTER III.

MR. DUMPHY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

PETER DUMPHY was true to his client. A few days after he had returned to San Francisco he despatched a note to Victor, asking an interview. He had reasoned that, although Victor was vanquished and helpless regarding the late discovery at One Horse Gulch, yet his complicity with Mrs. Conroy's earlier deceit might make it advisable that his recollection of that event should be effaced. He was waiting a reply when a card was brought to him by a clerk. Mr. Dumphy glanced at it impatiently, and read the name of "Arthur Poinsett." Autocrat as Dumphy was in his own counting-house and business circle, the name was one of such recognised power in California that he could not ignore its claims to his attention. More than that, it repre-

sented a certain respectability and social elevation, which Dumphy, with all his scepticism and democratic assertion, could not with characteristic shrewdness afford to undervalue. He said, "Show him in," without lifting his head from the papers that lay upon his desk.

The door opened again to an elegant-looking young man, who lounged carelessly into the awful presence without any of that awe with which the habitual business visitors approached Peter Dumphy. Indeed it was possible that never before had Mr. Dumphy's door opened to one who was less affected by the great capitalist's reputation. Nevertheless, with the natural ease of good breeding, after depositing his hat on the table, he walked quietly to the fireplace, and stood with his back toward it with courteous, but perhaps too indifferent patience. Mr. Dumphy was at last obliged to look up.

"Busy, I see," yawned Poinsett, with languid politeness. "Don't let me disturb you. I thought your man said you were disengaged. Must have made a mistake."

Mr. Dumphy was forced to lay aside his pen and rise, inwardly protesting.

"You don't know me by my card. I have the advantage, I think," continued the young man, with a smile, "even in the mere memory of faces. The last time I saw you was—let me see—five years ago. Yes! you were chewing a scrap of buffalo hide to keep yourself from starving."

"Philip Ashley," said Mr. Dumphy, in a low voice, looking hastily around, and drawing nearer the stranger.

"Precisely," returned Poinsett, somewhat impatiently raising his own voice. "That was my *nom de guerre*. But Dumphy seems to have been *your* real name after all."

If Dumphy had conceived any idea of embarrassing Poinsett by the suggestion of an *alias*, in his case, he could have dismissed it after this half-contemptuous recognition of his own proper cognomen. But he had no such idea. In spite of his utmost effort he felt himself gradually falling into the same relative position—the same humble subordination he had accepted five years before. It was useless to think of his

wealth, of his power, of his surroundings. Here in his own bank parlour he was submissively waiting the will and pleasure of this stranger. He made one more desperate attempt to regain his lost prestige.

"You have some business with me, eh? Poinsett!" He commenced the sentence with a dignity and ended it with a familiarity equally inefficacious.

"Of course," said Poinsett, carelessly, shifting his legs before the fire. "Shouldn't have called otherwise on a man of such affairs at such a time. You are interested, I hear, in a mine recently discovered at One Horse Gulch on the Rancho of the Blessed Innocents. One of my clients holds a grant, not yet confirmed, to the Rancho."

"Who?" said Mr. Dumphy, quickly.

"I believe that is not important nor essential for you to know until we make a formal claim," returned Arthur quietly, "but I don't mind satisfying your curiosity. It's Miss Dolores Salvatierra."

Mr. Dumphy felt relieved, and began with gathering courage and brusqueness, "That don't affect ——"

"Your mining claim; not in the least," interrupted Arthur, quietly. "I am not here to press or urge any rights that we may have. We may not even submit the grant for patent. But my client would like to know something of the present tenants, or, if you will, owners. You represent them, I think? A man and wife. The woman appears first as a spinster, assuming to be a Miss Grace Conroy, to whom an alleged transfer of an alleged grant was given. She next appears as the wife of one Gabriel Conroy, who is, I believe, an alleged brother of the alleged Miss Grace Conroy. You'll admit, I think, it's a pretty mixed business, and would make a pretty bad showing in court. But this adjudicature we are not yet prepared to demand. What we want to know is this—and I came to you, Dumphy, as the man most able to tell us. Is the sister or the brother real—or are they both impostors? Is there a legal marriage? Of course *your* legal interest is not jeopardized in any event."

Mr. Dumphy partly regained his audacity.

"*You* ought to know—*you* ran away with

the real Grace Conroy," he said, putting his hands in his pockets.

"Did I? Then this is not she, if I understand you. Thanks! And the brother ——"

"Is Gabriel Conroy, if I know the man," said Dumphy, shortly, feeling that he had been entrapped into a tacit admission. "But why don't you satisfy yourself?"

"You have been good enough to render it unnecessary," said Arthur, with a smile. "I do not doubt your word. I am, I trust, too much of a lawyer to doubt the witness I myself have summoned. But who is this woman?"

"The widow of Dr. Devarges."

"The *real* thing?"

"Yes, unless Grace Conroy should lay claim to that title and privilege. The old man seems to have been pretty much divided in his property and affections."

The shaft did not apparently reach Arthur, for whom it was probably intended. He only said, "Have you legal evidence that she *is* the widow? If it were a fact, and a case of ill-treatment or hardship, why

it might abate the claim of my client, who is a rich woman, and whose sympathies are of course in favour of the real brother and real sister. By the way, there is another sister, isn't there?"

"Yes, a mere child."

"That's all. Thank you. I shan't trespass further upon your time. Good-day."

He had taken up his hat and was moving toward the door. Mr. Dumphy, who felt that whatever might have been Poinsett's motives in this interview, he, Dumphy, had certainly gained nothing, determined to retrieve himself, if possible, by a stroke of audacity.

"One moment," he said, as Poinsett was carefully settling his hat over his curls. "You know whether this girl is living or not. What has become of her?"

"But I don't," returned Poinsett, calmly, "or I shouldn't come to *you*."

There was something about Poinsett's manner that prevented Dumphy from putting him in the category of "all men," that both in his haste and his deliberation Mr. Dumphy was apt to say "were liars."

"When and where did you see her last?" he asked, less curtly.

"I left her at a hunter's cabin near the North Fork while I went back for help. I was too late. A relief party from the valley had already discovered the other dead. When I returned for Grace she was gone—possibly with the relief party. I always supposed it was the expedition that succoured you."

There was a pause, in which these two scamps looked at each other. It will be remembered that both had deceived the relief party in reference to their connexions with the unfortunate dead. Neither believed, however, that the other was aware of the fact. But the inferior scamp was afraid to ask another question that might disclose his own falsehood; and the question which might have been an embarrassing one to Arthur, and have changed his attitude toward Dumphy, remained unasked. Not knowing the reason of Dumphy's hesitation, Arthur was satisfied of his ignorance, and was still left the master. He nodded carelessly to Dumphy and withdrew.

As he left the room he brushed against a short, thick-set man, who was entering at the same moment. Some instinct of mutual repulsion caused the two men to look at each other. Poinsett beheld a sallow face, that, in spite of its belonging to a square figure, seemed to have a consumptive look; a face whose jaw was narrow and whose lips were always half-parted over white, large, and protruding teeth; a mouth that apparently was always breathless—a mouth that Mr. Poinsett remembered as the distinguishing and unpleasant feature of some one vaguely known to him professionally. As the mouth gasped and parted further in recognition, Poinsett nodded carelessly in return, and attributing his repulsion to that extraordinary feature thought no more about it.

Not so the new-comer. He glanced suspiciously after Arthur and then at Mr. Dumphy. The latter, who had recovered his presence of mind and his old audacity, turned them instantly upon him.

"Well! What have you got to propose?" he said, with his usual curt formula.

"It is you have something to say; you sent for *me*," said his visitor."

"Yes. You left me to find out that there was another grant to that mine. What does all this mean, Ramirez?"

Victor raised his eyes and yellow fringes to the ceiling, and said, with a shrug—

"*Quien sabe?* there are grants and grants!"

"So it seems. But I suppose you know that we have a title now better than any grant—a mineral discovery."

Victor bowed and answered with his teeth, "*We*, eh?"

"Yes, I am getting up a company for her husband."

"Her husband—good!"

Dumphy looked at his accomplice keenly. There was something in Victor's manner that was vaguely suspicious. Dumphy, who was one of those men to whose courage the habit of success in all things was essential, had been a little shaken by his signal defeat in his interview with Poinsett, and now became irritable.

"Yes—her husband. What have you got to propose about it, eh? Nothing?

Well, look here, I sent for you to say that as everything now is legal and square, you might as well dry up in regard to her former relations or your first scheme. You sabe?" Dumphy became slangy as he lost his self-control. "You are to know nothing about Miss Grace Conroy."

"And there is no more any sister, eh—only a wife?"

"Exactly."

"So."

"You will of course get something for these preliminary steps of yours, although you understand they have been useless, and that your claim is virtually dead. You are, in fact, in no way connected with her present success. Unless—unless," added Dumphy, with a gratuitous malice that defeat had engendered, "unless you expect something for having been the means of making a match between her and Gabriel."

Victor turned a little more yellow in the thin line over his teeth. "Ha! ha! good—a joke," he laughed. "No, I make no charge to you for that; not even to you. No—ha! ha!" At the same moment had

Mr. Dumphy known what was passing in his mind he would have probably moved a little nearer the door of his counting-room.

"There's nothing we can pay you for but silence. We may as well understand each other regarding that. That's your interest; it's ours only so far as Mrs. Conroy's social standing is concerned, for I warn you that exposure might seriously compromise you in a business way, while it would not hurt us. I could get the value of Gabriel's claim to the mine advanced to-morrow, if the whole story were known to-night. If you remember, the only evidence of a previous discovery exists in a paper in our possession. Perhaps we pay you for that. Consider it so, if you like. Consider also that any attempt to get hold of it legally or otherwise would end in its destruction. Well, what do you say? All right. When the stock is issued I'll write you a cheque: or perhaps you'd take a share of stock?"

"I would prefer the money," said Victor, with a peculiar laugh.

Dumphy affected to take no notice of the sarcasm. "Your head is level, Victor,"

he said, returning to his papers. "Don't meddle with stocks. Good-day!"

Victor moved toward the door. "By the way, Victor," said Dumphy, looking up, calmly, "if you know the owner of this lately discovered grant, you might intimate that any litigation wouldn't pay. That's what I told their counsel a moment ago."

"Poinsett?" asked Victor, pausing, with his hand on the door.

"Yes! But as he also happens to be Philip Ashley—the chap who ran off with Grace Conroy, you had better go and see him. Perhaps he can help you better than I. Good-day."

And, turning from the petrified Victor, Mr. Dumphy, conscious that he had fully regained his prestige, rang his bell to admit the next visitor.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. JACK HAMLIN TAKES A HOLIDAY.

FOR some weeks Mr. Hamlin had not been well, or, as he more happily expressed it, had been "off colour." The celebrated Dr. Duchesne, an ex-army surgeon, after a careful diagnosis, had made several inquiries of Jack, in a frank way that delighted Mr. Hamlin, and then had said, very quietly—

"You are not doing justice to your profession, Jack. Your pulse is 75, and that won't do for a man who habitually deals faro. Been doing pretty well lately, and having a good time, eh? I thought so! You've been running too fast, and under too high pressure. You must take these weights off the safety valve, Jack—better take the blower down altogether. Bank your fires and run on half steam. For the

next two months I shall run you. You must live like a Christian." Noticing the horror of Jack's face, he added hastily, "I mean, go to bed before midnight, get up before you want to, eat more and drink less, don't play to win, bore yourself thoroughly, and by that time I'll be able to put you back at that table as strong, and cool as ever. You used to sing, Jack; sit down at the piano and give me a taste of your quality. * * * There, that 'll do; I thought so! You' re out of practice and voice. Do that every day, for a week, and it will come easier. I haven't seen you stop and talk to a child for a month. What 's become of that little boot-black that you used to bedevil? I 've a devilish good mind to send you to a found-ling hospital for the good of the babies and yourself. Find out some poor ranchero with a dozen children, and teach 'em sing-ing. Don't mind what you eat, as long as you eat regularly. I 'd have more hopes of you, Jack, if I' d dragged you out of Star-vation Camp, in the Sierras, as I did a poor fellow, six years ago, than finding you here in these luxurious quarters. Come! Do as

I say, and I 'll stop that weariness, dissipate that giddiness, get rid of that pain, lower that pulse, and put you back where you were. I don 't like your looks, Jack, at all. I 'd buck against any bank you ran, all night."

From which the intelligent reader will, I hope and trust, perceive that this popular doctor's ideas of propriety resided wholly in his intentions. With the abstract morality of Hamlin's profession as a gambler he did not meddle; with his competency to practise that profession only was he concerned. Indeed so frank was he in his expression, that a few days later he remarked to a popular clergyman, " I must put you under the same treatment as I did Jack Hamlin—do you know him?—a gambler and a capital fellow; you remind me of him. Same kind of trouble—cured him as I will you." And he did.

The result of which advice was that in two weeks Mr. Jack Hamlin found himself dreadfully bored and *ennuyé*, but loyal to his trust with his physician, wandering in the lower coast counties. At San Luis Rey,

he attended a bull-fight, and was sorely tempted to back the bull heavily, and even conceived the idea of introducing a grizzly bear, taking all the odds himself, but remembered his promise, and fled the fascination. And so the next day, in a queer old-fashioned diligence, he crossed the coast range, and drifted into the quiet Mission of San Antonio. Here he was so done up and bored with the journey and the unpromising aspect of the town, that he quietly yielded his usual profane badinage of the landlord to his loyal henchman and negro body-servant, "Pete," and went to bed at the solitary "Fonda," in the usual flea-infested bedroom of the Spanish California inn.

"What does she look like, Pete?" said Jack, languidly.

Pete, who was familiar with his master's peculiarities of speech, knew that the feminine pronoun referred to the town, and responded with great gravity—

"De fac' is, Mahs Jack, dah dont peah to be much show heah foh you. Deys playin' three-card monte in the bah room, but 'taint no squar game. It 'ud do you no good, it

might jess rile you. Deys a fass pinto hoss hitched to a poss in de yard—a hoss dat de owner don't seem to understand nohow. If you was right smart agin, I might let you go down dar and get a bet outer some o' dem Greasers. But 'twon't do nohow. Deys a kind o' school—Sunday-school, I reckon—nex doah. Lots o' little children saying prayers, singin' and praisin' de Lord, sah."

"What day is this?" asked Jack, with sudden trepidation.

"Sunday, sah."

Jack uttered a plaintive groan and rolled over.

"Give one of these children a quarter, and tell him there 's another quarter waiting for him up here."

"You won't get no child to fool wid dis day, Mahs Jack, shuah. Deys bound to get licked when dey goes. Folks is mighty hard on dem boys, Sunday, sah; and it's de Lord's day, Mahs Jack."

Partly for the sake of horrifying his attendant, who notwithstanding his evil associations was very devout, Jack gave way

to violent denunciation of any system of theology that withheld children from romping with him any day he might select.

"Open that window," he groaned, finally, "and shove the bed alongside of it. That'll do. Hand me that novel. You needn't read to me to-day; you can finish that 'Volney's Ruins' another time."

It may be remarked here, that it had been Jack's invalid habit to get Pete to read to him. As he had provided himself with such books as were objectionable to Pete, as they were always utterly incomprehensible when filtered through his dialect, and as he always made the reader repeat the more difficult words, he extracted from this diversion a delicious enjoyment, which Pete never suspected.

"You can go now," he said, when Pete had arranged him comfortably. "I shan't want you this afternoon. Take some money. I reckon you won't find any church of your kind here, but if anybody interferes with you, jest lambaste him! If you can't do it, jest spot him, and *I* will!" (Mr. Hamlin never allowed anybody but himself to object to

his follower's religious tendencies.) "Have a good time, Pete! Don't tangle yourself up if you can help it. The liquor about here is jest pizen."

With this parting adjuration Mr. Hamlin turned over and tried to devote himself to his book. But after reading a few lines the letters somehow got blurred and indistinct, and he was obliged to put the book down with a much graver recollection of the doctor's warning than he had ever had before. He was obliged to confess to a singular weariness and lassitude that had become habitual, and to admit that he had more pain at times than—as he put it—"a man ought to have." The idea of his becoming blind or paralysed dawned upon him gradually, at first humorously; wondering if he couldn't deal faro as well without the use of his legs, for instance, which were of no account to a man under the table; if there could not be raised cards for the blind as well as raised letters. The idea of feeling a "pair" or a "flush" amused him greatly, and then he remembered more gravely poor Gordon, who, becoming gradually paralysed,

blew his brains out. "The best thing he could do," he soliloquized, seriously. The reflection, however, had left such a depressing effect upon his mind that the exaltation of liquor for a moment seemed to be the proper thing for him; but the next moment, remembering his promise to the doctor, he changed his mind, and—with an effort—his reflections.

For relief he turned his paling face to the window. It gave upon a dusty courtyard, the soil of which was pulverized by the pawing of countless hoofs during the long, dry summer; upon a tiled roof that rose above an adobe wall, over which again rose the two square whitewashed towers of the Mission church. Between these towers he caught a glimpse of dark green foliage, and beyond this the shining sea.

It was very hot and dry. Scarcely a wave of air stirred the curtains of the window. That afternoon the trade-winds which usually harried and bullied the little Mission of San Antonio did not blow, and a writhing weeping willow near the window, that whipped itself into trifling hysterics on the slightest

pretext, was surprised into a stony silence. Even the sea beyond glittered and was breathless. It reminded Jack of the mouth of the man he met in Sacramento at the hotel, and again had quarrelled with in San Francisco. And there, absolutely, was the man, the very man, gazing up at the hotel from the shadows of the courtyard. Jack was instantly and illogically furious. Had Pete been there he would at once have sent an insulting message; but, while he was looking at him, a sound rose upon the air which more pleasantly arrested his attention.

It was an organ. Not a very fine instrument, nor skilfully played. But an instrument that Jack was passionately fond of. I forgot to say that he had once occupied the position of organist in the Second Presbyterian Church of Sacramento, until a growing and more healthy public sentiment detected an incongruity between his secular and Sunday occupations, and a prominent deacon, a successful liquor-dealer, demanded his resignation. Although he afterward changed his attentions to a piano, he never entirely lost his old affections. To become

the possessor of a large organ, to introduce it gradually, educating the public taste, as a special feature of a first-class gambling saloon, had always been one of Jack's wildest ambitions. So he raised himself upon his elbow and listened. He could see also that the adjacent building was really a recent addition to the old Mission church, and that what appeared to be a recess in the wall was only a deeply embrasured window. Presently a choir of fresh young voices joined the organ. Mr. Hamlin, listened more attentively; it was one of Mozart's masses with which he was familiar.

For a few moments he forgot his pain and lassitude, and lying there hummed in unison. And then, like a true enthusiast, unmindful of his surroundings, he lifted his voice—a very touching tenor, well known among his friends—and joined in, drowning, I fear, the feebler pipe of the little acolytes within. Indeed, it was a fine sight to see this sentimental scamp, lying sick nigh unto dissolution through a dissipated life and infamous profession, down upon his back in the dingy *cuarto* of a cheap Spanish

inn, voicing the litanies of the Virgin. Howbeit, once started in he sang it through, and only paused when the antiphonal voices and organ ceased. Then he lifted his head, and, leaning on his elbow, looked across the courtyard. He had hoped for the appearance of some of the little singers, and had all ready a handful of coin to throw to them, and a few of those ingenious epithets and persuasive arguments by which he had always been successful with the young. But he was disappointed.

"I reckon school ain't out yet," he said to himself, and was about to lie down again, when a face suddenly appeared at the grating of the narrow window.

Mr. Hamlin as suddenly became breathless, and the colour rose to his pale face. He was very susceptible to female beauty, and the face that appeared at the grating was that of a very beautiful Indian girl. He thought, and was ready to swear, that he had never seen anything half so lovely. Framed in the recess of the embrasure as a shrine, it might have been a shadowed devotional image, but that the face was not

so angelically beautiful as it was femininely fascinating, and that the large deeply fringed eyes had an expression of bright impatience and human curiosity. From his secure vantage behind the curtain Mr. Hamlin knew that he could not be seen, and so lay and absorbed this lovely bronze apparition which his voice seemed to have evoked from the cold bronze adobe wall. And then, as suddenly, she was gone, and the staring sunlight and glittering sea beyond seemed to Mr. Hamlin to have gone too.

When Pete returned at sunset, he was amazed and alarmed to find his master dressed and sitting by the window. There was a certain brightness in his eye and an unwonted colour in his cheek that alarmed him still more.

"You ain't bin and gone done nuffin' agin de doctor's orders, Mahs Jack?" he began.

"You'll find the whisky flask all right, unless you've been dippin' into it, you infernal old hypocrite," responded Jack, cheerfully, accepting the implied suspicion

of his servant. "I've dressed myself because I'm goin' to church to-night, to find out where you get your liquor. I'm happy because I'm virtuous. Trot out that Volney's 'Ruins,' and wade in. You're gettin' out o' practice, Pete. Stop. Because you're religious, do you expect me to starve? Go and order supper first! Stop. Where in blank are you going? Here, you've been gone three hours on an errand for me, and if you ain't runnin' off without a word about it."

"Gone on an errand foh you, sah?" gasped the astonished Pete.

"Yes! Didn't I tell you to go round and see what was the kind of religious dispensation here?" continued Jack, with an unmoved face. "Didn't I charge you particularly to observe if the Catholic Church was such as a professing Christian and the former organist of the Second Presbyterian Church of Sacramento could attend? And now I suppose I've got to find out myself. I'd bet ten to one you ain't been there at all!"

In sheer embarrassment Pete began to

brush his master's clothes with ostentatious and apologetic diligence, and said—

"I'se no Papist, Mahs Jack, but if I'd thought——"

"Do you suppose I'm going to sit here without my supper while you abuse the Catholic Church—the only church that a gentleman——" but the frightened Pete was gone.

The Angelus bell had just rung, and it lacked a full half hour yet before vespers, when Mr. Hamlin lounged into the old Mission church. Only a few figures knelt here and there—mere vague, black shadows in the gloom. Aided, perhaps, more by intuition than the light of the dim candles on the high altar, he knew that the figure he looked for was not among them; and seeking the shadow of a column he calmly waited its approach. It seemed a long time. A heavy-looking woman, redolent of garlic, came in and knelt nearly opposite. A yellow vaquero, whom Mr. Hamlin recalled at once as one he had met on the road hither,—a man whose Spanish profanity, incited by unruly cattle, had excited Jack's

amused admiration,—dropped on his knees, and with equally characteristic volubility began a supplication to the Virgin. Then two or three men, whom Jack recognised as the monte-players of the "Fonda," began, as it seemed to Jack, to bewail their losses in lachrymose accents. And then Mr. Hamlin, highly excited, with a pulse that would have awakened the greatest concern of his doctor, became nervously and magnetically aware that some one else was apparently waiting and anxious as himself, and had turned *his* head at the entrance of each one of the congregation. It was a figure Jack had at first overlooked. Safe in the shadow of the column, he could watch it without being seen himself. Even in the gloom he could see the teeth and eyes of the man he had observed that afternoon—his old antagonist at Sacramento.

Had it been anywhere else Jack would have indulged his general and abstract detestation of Victor by instantly picking a quarrel with him. As it was, he determined upon following him when he left the church—of venting on him any possible

chagrin or disappointment he might then have, as an excitement to mitigate the unsupportable dreariness of the Mission. The passions are not so exclusive as moralists imagine, for Mr. Hamlin was beginning to have his breast filled with wrath against Victor, in proportion as his doubts of the appearance of the beautiful stranger grew stronger in his mind, when two figures momentarily darkened the church porch, and a rustle of silk stole upon his ear. A faint odour of spice penetrated through the incense. Jack looked up, and his heart stopped beating.

It was she. As she reached the stall nearly opposite she put aside her black veil, and disclosed the same calm, nymph-like face he had seen at the window. It was doubly beautiful now. Even the strange complexion had for Jack a bewildering charm. She looked around, hesitated for a moment, and then knelt between the two monte players. With an almost instinctive movement Jack started forward, as if to warn her of the contaminating contact. And then he stopped, his own face crim-

soned with shame. For the first time he had doubted the morality of his profession.

The organ pealed out; the incense swam; the monotonous voice of the priest rose upon the close, sluggish air, and Mr. Jack Hamlin dreamed a dream. He had dispossessed the cold, mechanical organist, and seating himself at the instrument, had summoned all the powers of reed and voice to sing the pæans—ah, me! I fear not of any abstract Being, but of incarnate flesh and blood. He heard her pure, young voice lifted beside his; even in that cold passionless commingling there was joy unspeakable, and he knew himself exalted. Yet he was conscious even in his dream, from his own hurried breathing, and something that seemed to swell in his throat, that he could not have sung a note. And then he came back to his senses, and a close examination of the figure before him. He looked at the graceful shining head, the rich lace veil, the quiet elegance of attire, even to the small satin slipper that stole from beneath her silken robe—all united with a refinement

and an air of jealous seclusion, that somehow removed him to an immeasurable distance.

The anthem ceased, the last notes of the organ died away, and the lady rose. Half an hour before Jack would have gladly stepped forward to have challenged even a passing glance from the beautiful eyes of the stranger; now a timidity and distrust new to the man took possession of him. He even drew back closer in the shadow as she stepped toward the pillar, which supported on its face a font of holy water. She had already slipped off her glove, and now she leaned forward—so near he could almost feel her warm breath—and dipped her long, slim fingers into the water. As she crossed herself with the liquid symbol, Jack gave a slight start. One or two drops of holy water thrown from her little fingers had fallen on his face.

CHAPTER V.

VICTOR MAKES A DISCOVERY.

HAPPILY for Mr. Hamlin, the young girl noticed neither the effect of her unconscious baptismal act, nor its object, but moved away slowly to the door. As she did so, Jack stepped from the shadow of the column, and followed her with eyes of respectful awe and yearning. She had barely reached the porch, when she suddenly and swiftly turned and walked hurriedly back, almost brushing against Mr. Hamlin. Her beautiful eyes were startled and embarrassed, her scarlet lips parted and paling rapidly, her whole figure and manner agitated and discomposed. Without noticing him she turned toward the column, and under the pretext of using the holy water took hold of the font and

leaned against it, as if for support, with her face averted from the light. Jack could see her hands tighten nervously on the stone, and fancied that her whole figure trembled as she stood there.

He hesitated for a moment, and then moved to her side; not audaciously and confident, as was his wont with women, but with a boyish colour in his face, and a timid, half-embarrassed manner.

"Can I do anything for you, Miss?" he said, falteringly. "You don't seem to be well. I mean, you look tired. Shan't I bring you a chair? It's the heat of this hole—I mean, it's so warm here. Shan't I go for a glass of water, a carriage?"

Here she suddenly lifted her eyes to his, and his voice and presence of mind utterly abandoned him.

"It's nothing," she said, with a dignified calm, as sudden and as alarming to Jack as her previous agitation — "nothing," she added, fixing her clear eyes on his, with a look so frank, so open, and withal, as it seemed to Jack, so cold and indifferent, that his own usually bold glance fell beneath it,

"nothing but the heat and closeness; I am better now."

"Shall I——" began Jack, awkwardly.

"I want nothing, thank you."

Seeming to think that her conduct required some explanation, she added hastily,

"There was a crowd at the door as I was going out, and in the press I felt giddy. I thought some one—some man—pushed me rudely. I daresay I was mistaken."

She glanced at the porch against which a man was still leaning.

The suggestion of her look and speech—if it were a suggestion—was caught instantly by Jack. Without waiting for her to finish the sentence, he strode to the door. To his wrathful surprise the lounger was Victor. Mr. Hamlin did not stop for explanatory speech. With a single expressive word, and a single dexterous movement of his arm and foot, he tumbled the astonished Victor down the steps at one side, and then turned toward his late companion. But she had been equally prompt. With a celerity quite inconsistent with her previous faintness, she seized the moment that Victor disappeared

to dart by him and gain her carriage, which stood in waiting at the porch. But as it swiftly drove away, Mr. Hamlin caught one grateful glance from those wonderful eyes, one smile from those perfect lips, and was happy. What matters that he had an explanation—possibly a quarrel on his hands? Ah me! I fear this added zest to the rascal's satisfaction.

A hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned and saw the face of the furious Victor, with every tooth at a white heat, and panting with passion. Mr. Hamlin smiled pleasantly.

"Why, I want to know!" he ejaculated, with an affectation of rustic simplicity, "if it ain't you, Johnny. Why, darn my skin! And this is your house? You and St. Anthony in partnership, eh? Well, that gets me! And here I tumbled you off your own stoop, didn't I? I might have known it was you by the way you stood there. Mightn't I, Johnny?"

"My name is not Johnny—*Carámba!*" gasped Victor, almost beside himself with impatient fury.

"Oh, it's that, is it? Any relation to the *Carámbas* of Dutch Flat? It ain't a pretty name. I like Johnny better. And I wouldn't make a row here now. Not to-day, Johnny; it's Sunday. I'd go home. I'd go quietly home, and I'd beat some woman or child to keep myself in training. But I'd go home first. I wouldn't draw that knife, neither, for it might cut your fingers, and frighten the folks around town. I'd go home quietly, like a good nice little man. And in the morning I'd come round to the hotel on the next square, and I'd ask for Mr. Hamlin, Mr. Jack Hamlin, Room No. 29; and I'd go right up to his room, and I'd have such a time with him—such a high old time; I'd just make that hotel swim with blood."

Two or three of the monte-players had gathered around Victor, and seemed inclined to take the part of their countryman. Victor was not slow to improve this moment of adhesion and support.

"Is it dogs that we are, my compatriots?" he said to them bitterly; "and he—this one—a man infamous!"

Mr. Hamlin, who had a quick ear for abusive and interjaculatory Spanish, overheard him. There was a swift chorus of "*Carámba!*" from the allies, albeit wholesomely restrained by something in Mr. Hamlin's eye which was visible, and probably a suspicion of something in Mr. Hamlin's pocket which was not visible. But the remaining portion of Mr. Hamlin was ironically gracious.

"Friends of yours, I suppose?" he inquired, affably. "'*Carámbas*' all of them, too! Perhaps they'll call with you? Maybe they haven't time and are in a hurry now? If my room isn't large enough, and they can't wait, there's a handy lot o' ground beyond on the next square—*Plaza del Toros*, eh? What did you say? I'm a little deaf in this ear."

Under the pretence of hearing more distinctly, Jack Hamlin approached the nearest man, who, I grieve to say, instantly and somewhat undignifiedly retreated. Mr. Hamlin laughed. But already a crowd of loungers had gathered, and he felt it was time to end this badinage, grateful as it was

to his sense of humour. So he lifted his hat gravely to Victor and his friends, replaced it perhaps aggressively tilted a trifle over his straight nose, and lounged slowly back to his hotel, leaving his late adversaries in secure but unsatisfactory and dishonourable possession of the field. Once in his own quarters, he roused the sleeping Pete, and insisted upon opening a religious discussion, in which, to Pete's great horror, he warmly espoused the Catholic Church, averring, with several strong expletives, that it was the only religion fit for a white man, and ending somewhat irrelevantly by inquiring into the condition of the pistols.

Meanwhile Victor had also taken leave of his friends.

"He has fled—this most infamous!" he said; "he dared not remain and face us! Thou didst observe his fear, Tiburcio? It was thy great heart that did it!"

"Rather he recognised thee, my Victor, and his heart was that of the coyote."

"It was the Mexican nation, ever responsive to the appeal of manhood and liberty, that made his liver as blanched as

that of the chicken," returned the gentleman who had retreated from Jack. "Let us then celebrate this triumph with a little glass."

And Victor, who was anxious to get away from his friends, and saw in the prospective *aguardiente* a chance for escape, generously led the way to the first wine-shop.

It chanced to be the principal one of the town. It had the generic quality—that is, was dirty, dingy, ill-smelling, and yellow with cigarette smoke. Its walls were adorned by various prints—one or two French in origin, excellent in art, and defective in moral sentiment, and several of Spanish origin, infamous in art, and admirable in religious feeling. It had a portrait of Santa Anna, and another of the latest successful revolutionary general. It had an allegorical picture representing the Genius of Liberty descending with all the celestial machinery upon the Mexican Confederacy. Moved apparently by the same taste for poetry and personification, the proprietor had added to his artistic collection a highly coloured American handbill representing the Angel

of Healing presenting a stricken family with a bottle of somebody's Panacea. At the further extremity of the low room a dozen players sat at a green-baize table absorbed in monte. Beyond them, leaning against the wall, a harp-player twanged the strings of his instrument, in a lugubrious air, with that singular stickiness of touch and reluctancy of finger peculiar to itinerant performers on that instrument. The card-players were profoundly indifferent to both music and performer.

The face of one of the players attracted Victor's attention. It was that of the odd English translator—the irascible stranger upon whom he had intruded that night of his memorable visit to Don José. Victor had no difficulty in recognising him, although his slovenly and negligent working-dress had been changed to his holiday antique black suit. He did not lift his eyes from the game until he had lost the few silver coins placed in a pile before him, when he rose grimly, and nodding brusquely to the other players, without speaking left the room.

"He has lost five half-dollars—his regular limit—no more, no less," said Victor to his friend. "He will not play again to-night!"

"You know of him?" asked Vincente, in admiration of his companion's superior knowledge.

"Si!" said Victor. "He is a jackal, a dog of the Americanos," he added, vaguely intending to revenge himself on the stranger's former brusqueness by this depreciation. "He affects to know our history—our language. Is it a question of the fine meaning of a word—the shade of a technical expression?—it is him they ask, not us! It is thus they treat us, these heretics! *Carámba!*"

"*Carámba!*" echoed Vincente, with a vague patriotism superinduced by *aguardiente*. But Victor had calculated to unloose Vincente's tongue for his private service.

"It is the world, my friend," he said, sententiously. "These Americanos—come they here often?"

"You know the great American ad-

vocate — our friend — Don Arturo Poinsett?"

"Yes," said Victor, impatiently. "Comes he?"

"Eh! does he not?" laughed Vincente. "Always. Ever. Eternally. He has a client—a widow, young, handsome, rich, eh?—one of his own race."

"Ah! you are wise, Vincente!"

Vincente laughed a weak spirituous laugh.

"Ah! it is a transparent fact. Truly—of a verity. Believe me!"

"And this fair client—who is she?"

"Donna Maria Sepulvida!" said Vincente, in a drunken whisper.

"How is this? You said she was of his own race."

"Truly, I did. She is *Americana.* But it is years ago. She was very young. When the Americans first came, she was of the first. She taught the child of the widower Don José Sepulvida, herself almost a child; you understand? It was the old story. She was pretty, and poor, and young; the Don grizzled, and old, and rich. It was fire and tow. Eh? Ha! Ha! The Don

meant to be kind, you understand, and made a rich wife of the little *Americana*. He was kinder than he meant, and in two years, *Carámba!* made a richer widow of the Donna."

If Vincente had not been quite thrown by his potations, he would have seen an undue eagerness in Victor's mouth and eyes.

"And she is pretty—tall and slender like the Americans, eh?—large eyes, a sweet mouth?"

"An angel. Ravishing!"

"And Don Arturo—from legal adviser turns a lover!"

"It is said," responded Vincent, with drunken cunning and exceeding archness; "but thou and I, Victor, know better. Love comes not with a brief! Eh? Look, it is an old flame, believe me. It is said it is not two months that he first came here, and she fell in love with him at the first glance. *Absurdo! Disparátado!* Hear me, Victor; it was an old flame; an old quarrel made up. Thou and I have heard the romance before. Two lovers not rich, eh?

Good! Separation; despair. The Señorita marries the rich man, eh?"

Victor was too completely carried away by the suggestion of his friend's speech, to conceal his satisfaction. Here was the secret at last. Here was not only a clue, but absolutely the missing Grace Conroy herself. In this young *Americana*—this—widow—this client of her former lover, Philip Ashley, he held the secret of three lives. In his joy he slapped Vincente on the back, and swore roundly that he was the wisest of men.

"I should have seen her—the heroine of this romance—my friend. Possibly, she was at mass?"

"Possibly not. She is Catholic, but Don Arturo is not. She does not often attend when he is here."

"As to-day?"

"As to-day."

"You are wrong, friend Vincente," said Victor, a little impatiently. "I was there; I saw her."

Vincente shrugged his shoulders and shook his head with drunken gravity.

"It is impossible, Señor Victor, believe me."

"I tell you I saw her," said Victor, excitedly. "*Borrachon!* She was there! By the pillar. As she went out she partook of *agua bendita.* I saw her; large eyes, an oval face, a black dress and mantle."

Vincente, who, happily for Victor, had not heard the epithet of his friend, shook his head and laughed a conceited drunken laugh.

"Tell me not this, friend Victor. It was not her thou didst see. Believe me, I am wise. It was the Donna Dolores who partook of *agua bendita* and alone. For there is none, thou knowest, that has a right to offer it to her. Look you, foolish Victor, she has large eyes, a small mouth, an oval face. And dark—ah, she is dark!"

"'In the dark all are as the devil,'" quoted Victor, impatiently, "how should I know? Who then *is* she?" he demanded almost fiercely, as if struggling with a rising fear. "Who is this Donna Dolores?"

"Thou art a stranger, friend Victor. Hark ye. It is the half-breed daughter of

the old Commander of San Ysabel. Yet, such is the foolishness of old men, she is his heiress! She is rich, and lately she has come into possession of a great grant, very valuable. Thou dost understand, friend Victor? Well, why dost thou stare? She is a recluse. Marriage is not for her; love, love! the tender, the subduing, the delicious, is not for her. She is of the Church, my Victor. And to think! thou didst mistake this ascetic, this nun, this little brown novice, this Donna Dolores Salvatierra for the little American coquette. Ha! Ha! It is worth the fee of another bottle! Eh? Victor, my friend! Thou dost not listen. Eh? Thou wouldst fly, traitor. Eh? what's that thou sayest? Bobo! Dupe thyself!"

For Victor stood before him, dumb, but for that single epithet. Was he not a dupe? Had he not been cheated again, and this time by a blunder in his own malice? If he had really, as he believed, identified Grace Conroy in this dark-faced devotee whose name he now learned for the first time, by what diabolical mischance had he

deliberately put her in possession of the forged grant, and so blindly restored her the missing property? Could Don Pedro have been treacherous? Could he have known, could they all—Arthur Poinsett, Dumphy, and Julie Devarges—have known this fact of which he alone was ignorant? Were they not laughing at him now? The thought was madness.

With a vague impression of being shaken rudely off by a passionate hand, and a drunken vision of a ghastly and passionate face before him uttering words of impotent rage and baffled despair, Vincente, the wise and valiant, came slowly and amazedly to himself lying over a table. But his late companion was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

AN EXPERT.

A COLD, grey fog had that night stolen noiselessly in from the sea, and after possessing the town had apparently intruded itself in the long low plain before the *hacienda* of the Rancho of the Holy Trinity, where it sullenly lingered even after the morning sun had driven in its eastern outposts. Viewed from the Mission towers, it broke a cold grey sea against the corral of the *hacienda* and half hid the white walls of the *hacienda* itself. It was characteristic of the Rancho that under such conditions, at certain times it seemed to vanish entirely from the sight, or rather to lose and melt itself into the outlines of the low foothills, and Mr. Perkins, the English translator, driving a buggy that

morning in that direction was forced once or twice to stop and take his bearings anew, until the grey sea fell and the *hacienda* again heaved slowly into view.

Although Mr. Perkins' transformations were well known to his intimate associates, it might have been difficult for any stranger to have recognised the slovenly drudge of Pacific Street in the antique dandy who drove the buggy. Mr. Perkins' hair was brushed, curled, and darkened by dye. A high stock of a remote fashion encompassed his neck, above which his face, whitened by cosmetics to conceal his high complexion, rested stiffly and expressionless as a mask. A light blue coat buttoned tightly over his breast, and a pair of close-fitting trousers strapped over his japanned leather boots completed his remarkable *ensemble.* It was a figure well known on Montgomery Street after three o'clock—seldom connected with the frouzy visitor of the Pacific Street den, and totally unrecognisable on the plains of San Antonio.

It was evident, however, that this figure, eccentric as it was, was expected at the

hacienda, and recognised as having an importance beyond its antique social distinction. For when Mr. Perkins drew up in the court-yard, the grave *major domo* at once ushered him into the formal, low-studded drawing-room already described in these pages, and in another instant the Doña Dolores Salvatierra stood before him.

With a refined woman's delicacy of perception, Doña Dolores instantly detected under this bizarre exterior something that atoned for it which she indicated by the depth of the half-formal courtesy she made it. Mr. Perkins met the salutation with a bow equally formal and respectful. He was evidently agreeably surprised at his reception, and impressed with her manner. But like most men of ill-assured social position he was a trifle suspicious and on the defensive. With a graceful gesture of her fan the Doña pointed to a chair, but her guest remained standing.

"*I* am a stranger to you, Señor, but *you* are none to me," she said, with a gracious smile. "Before I ventured upon the boldness of seeking this interview, your intelli-

gence, your experience, your honourable report was already made known to me by your friends. Let me call myself one of these—even before I break the business for which I have summoned you."

The absurd figure bowed again, but even through the pitiable chalk and cosmetics of its complexion, an embarrassed colour showed itself. Doña Dolorès noticed it, but delicately turned toward an old-fashioned secretary; and opened it, to give her visitor time to recover himself. She drew from a little drawer a folded, legal-looking document, and then placing two chairs beside the secretary, seated herself in one. Thus practically reminded of his duty, Mr. Perkins could no longer decline the proffered seat.

"I suppose," said Doña Dolores, "that my business, although familiar to you generally—although you are habitually consulted upon just such questions—may seem strange to you, when you frankly learn my motives. Here is a grant purporting to have been made to my—father—the late Don José Salvatierra. Examine it

carefully, and answer me a single question to the best of your judgment." She hesitated, and then added—"Let me say, before you answer yes or no, that to me there are no pecuniary interests involved—nothing that should make you hesitate to express an opinion which you might be called upon legally to prove. *That* you will never be required to give. Your answer will be accepted by me in confidence; will not, as far as the world is concerned, alter the money value of this document—will leave you free hereafter to express a different opinion, or even to reverse your judgment publicly if the occasion requires it. You seem astounded, Señor Perkins. But I am a rich woman. I have no need to ask your judgment to increase my wealth."

"Your question is——" said Mr. Perkins, speaking for the first time without embarrassment.

"Is that document a forgery?"

He took it out of her hand, opened it with a kind of professional carelessness, barely glanced at the signature and seals, and returned it.

"The signatures are genuine," he said, with business-like brevity; then he added, as if in explanation of that brevity, "I have seen it before."

Doña Dolores moved her chair with the least show of uneasiness. The movement attracted Mr. Perkins' attention. It was something novel. Here was a woman who appeared actually annoyed that her claim to a valuable property was valid. He fixed his eyes upon her curiously.

"Then you think it is a genuine grant?" she said, with a slight sigh.

"As genuine as any that receive a patent at Washington," he replied, promptly.

"Ah!" said Doña Dolores, simply. The feminine interjection appeared to put a construction upon Señor Perkins' reply that both annoyed and challenged him. He assumed the defensive.

"Have you any reason to doubt the genuineness of this particular document?"

"Yes. It was only recently discovered among Don José's papers, and there is another in existence."

Señor Perkins again reached out his hand,

took the paper, examined it attentively, held it to the light and then laid it down. "It is all right," he said. "Where is the other?"

"I have it not," said Doña Dolores.

Señor Perkins shrugged his shoulders respectfully as to Doña Dolores, but scornfully of an unbusiness-like sex. "How did you expect me to institute a comparison?"

"There is no comparison necessary if that document is genuine," said the Doña, quickly.

Señor Perkins was embarrassed for a moment. "I mean there might be some mistake. Under what circumstances is it held—who holds it? To whom was it given?"

"That is a part of my story. It was given five years ago to a Dr. Devarges—I beg your pardon, did you speak?"

Señor Perkins had not spoken, but was staring with grim intensity at Doña Dolores. "You—said—Dr. Devarges," he repeated, slowly.

"Yes. Did you know him?" It was Doña Dolores' turn to be embarrassed. She

bit her lip and slightly contracted her eyebrows. For a moment they both stood on the defensive.

"I have heard the name before," Mr Perkins said at last, with a forced laugh.

"Yes, it is the name of a distinguished *savant*," said Doña Dolores, composedly. "Well—*he* is dead. But he gave this grant to a young girl named—named"—Dolores paused as if to recall the name—"named Grace Conroy."

She stopped and raised her eyes quickly to her companion, but his face was unmoved, and his momentary excitement seemed to have passed. He nodded his head for her to proceed.

"Named Grace Conroy," repeated Doña Dolores, more rapidly, and with freer breath. "After the lapse of five years a woman—an impostor—appears to claim the grant under the name of Grace Conroy. But perhaps finding difficulty in carrying out her infamous scheme, by some wicked, wicked art, she gains the affections of the brother of this Grace, and marries him as the next surviving heir." And Doña Dolores paused,

a little out of breath, with a glow under her burnished cheek and a slight metallic quality in her voice. It was perhaps no more than the natural indignation of a quickly sympathizing nature, but Mr. Perkins did not seem to notice it. In fact within the last few seconds his whole manner had become absent and preoccupied; the stare which he had fixed a moment before on Doña Dolores was now turned to the wall, and his old face, under its juvenile mask, looked still older.

"Certainly, certainly," he said at last, recalling himself with an effort. "But all this only goes to prove that the grant may be as fraudulent as the owner. Then, you have nothing really to make you suspicious of your own claim but the fact of its recent discovery? Well, that I don't think need trouble you. Remember your grant was given when lands were not valuable, and your late father might have overlooked it as unimportant." He rose with a slight suggestion in his manner that the interview had closed. He appeared anxious to withdraw, and not entirely free from the same

painful pre-absorption that he had lately shown. With a slight shade of disappointment in her face Doña Dolores also rose.

In another moment he would have been gone, and the lives of these two people thus brought into natural yet mysterious contact have flowed on unchanged in each monotonous current. But as he reached the door he turned to ask a trivial question. On that question trembled the future of both.

"This real Grace Conroy then I suppose has disappeared. And this—Doctor—Devarges"—he hesitated at the name as something equally fictitious—"you say is dead. How then did this impostor gain the knowledge necessary to set up the claim. Who is *she?*"

"O she is—that is—she married Gabriel Conroy under the name of the widow of Dr. Devarges. Pardon me! I did not hear what you said. Holy Virgin! What is the matter? You are ill. Let me call Sanchez! Sit here!"

He dropped into a chair, but only for an instant. As she turned to call assistance he rose and caught her by the arm.

"I am better," he said. "It is nothing—I am often taken in this way. Don't look at me. Don't call anybody except to get me a glass of water—there, that will do."

He took the glass she brought him, and instead of drinking it threw back his head and poured it slowly over his forehead and face as he leaned backward in the chair. Then he drew out a large silk handkerchief and wiped his face and hair until they were dry. Then he sat up and faced her. The chalk and paint was off his face, his high stock had become unbuckled, he had unbuttoned his coat and it hung loosely over his gaunt figure; his hair, although still dripping, seemed to have become suddenly bristling and bushy over his red face. But he was perfectly self-possessed, and his voice had completely lost its previous embarrassment.

"Rush of blood to the head," he said, quietly; "felt it coming on all the morning. Gone now. Nothing like cold water and sitting posture. Hope I didn't spoil your carpet. And now to come back to your business." He drew up his chair without

the least trace of his former diffidence, beside Doña Dolores. "Let's take another look at your grant." He took it up, drew a small magnifying glass from his pocket and examined the signature. "Yes, yes! signature all right. Seal of the Custom House. Paper all regular." He rustled it in his fingers. "You're all right—the swindle is with Madame Devarges. There's the forgery—there's this spurious grant."

"I think not," said Doña Dolores, quietly.

"Why?"

"Suppose the grant is exactly like this in everything, paper, signature, seal and all."

"That proves nothing," said Mr. Perkins, quickly. "Look you. When this grant was drawn—in the early days—there were numbers of these grants lying in the Custom House like waste paper, drawn and signed by the Governor, in blank, only wanting filling in by a clerk to make them a valid document. She!—this impostor—this Madame Devarges, has had access to these blanks, as many have since the American Conquest, and that grant is the result.

But she is not wise, no! I know the handwriting of the several copyists and clerks—I was one myself. Put me on the stand, Doña Dolores—put me on the stand and I'll confront her as I have the others."

"You forget," said Doña Dolores, coldly, "that I have no desire to legally test this document. And if Spanish grants are so easily made why might not this one of mine be a fabrication? You say you know the handwriting of the copyists—look at this."

Mr. Perkins seized the grant impatiently, and ran his eye quickly over the interlineations between the printed portions. "Strange!" he muttered. "This is not my own nor Sanchez; nor Ruiz; it is a new hand. Ah! what have we here—a correction in the date—in still another hand? And this—surely I have seen something like it in the office. But where?" He stopped, ran his fingers through his hair, but after an effort at recollection abandoned the attempt. "But why," he said, abruptly, "why should this be forged?"

"Suppose that the other were genuine, and suppose that this woman got possession

of it in some wicked way. Suppose that some one, knowing of this, endeavoured by this clever forgery to put difficulties in her way without exposing her."

"But who would do that?"

"Perhaps the brother—her husband! Perhaps some one," continued Doña Dolores, embarrassedly, with the colour struggling through her copper cheek, "some—one—who—did—not—believe that the real Grace Conroy was dead or missing!"

"Suppose the devil!—I beg your pardon. But people don't forge documents in the interests of humanity and justice. And why should it be given to *you?*"

"I am known to be a rich woman," said Doña Dolores. "I believe," she added, dropping her eyes with a certain proud diffidence that troubled even the preoccupied man before her, "I—believe—that is I am told—that I have a reputation for being liberal, and—and just."

Mr. Perkins looked at her for a moment with undisguised admiration. "But suppose," he said, with a bitterness that seemed to grow out of that very contemplation,

"suppose this woman, this adventuress, this impostor, were a creature that made any such a theory impossible. Suppose she were one who could poison the very life and soul of any man—to say nothing of the man who was legally bound to her; suppose she were a devil who could deceive the mind and heart, who could make the very man she was betraying most believe her guiltless and sinned against; suppose she were capable of not even the weakness of passion; but that all her acts were shrewd, selfish, pre-calculated even to a smile or a tear—do you think such a woman—whom, thank God! such as *you* cannot even imagine—do you suppose such a woman would not have guarded against even this? No! no!"

"Unless," said Doña Dolores, leaning against the secretary with the glow gone from her dark face and a strange expression trembling over her mouth, "unless it were the revenge of some rival."

Her companion started. "Good! It is so," he muttered to himself. "*I* would have done it. I could have done it! You are right, Doña Dolores." He walked to

the window and then came hurriedly back, buttoning his coat as he did so and re-buckling his stock. "Some one is coming! Leave this matter with me. I will satisfy you and myself concerning this affair. Will you trust this paper with me?" Doña Dolores without a word placed it in his hand. "Thank you," he said, with a slight return of his former embarrassment, that seemed to belong to his ridiculous stock and his buttoned coat rather than any physical or moral quality. "Don't believe me entirely disinterested either," he added, with a strange smile. "*Adios.*"

She would have asked another question, but at that instant the clatter of hoofs and sound of voices arose from the courtyard, and with a hurried bow he was gone. The door opened again almost instantly to the bright laughing face and coquettish figure of Mrs. Sepulvida.

"Well!" said that little lady, as soon as she recovered her breath. "For a religiously inclined young person and a notorious recluse, I must say you certainly have more masculine company than falls to the lot of

the worldly. Here I ran across a couple of fellows hanging around the *casa* as I drove up, and come in only to find you closeted with an old exquisite. Who was it—another lawyer, dear? I declare, it's too bad. *I* have only one!"

"And that one is enough, eh?" smiled Doña Dolores, somewhat gravely, as she playfully tapped Mrs. Sepulvida's fair cheek with her fan.

"O yes!" she blushed a little coquettishly —"of course! And here I rode over, post haste, to tell you the news. But first, tell me who is that wicked, dashing-looking fellow outside the courtyard? It can't be the lawyer's clerk."

"I don't know who you mean; but it is, I suppose," said Doña Dolores, a little wearily. "But tell me the news. I am all attention."

But Mrs. Sepulvida ran to the deep embrasured window and peeped out. "It isn't the lawyer, for he is driving away in his buggy, as if he were hurrying to get out of the fog, and my gentleman still remains.

Dolores!" said Mrs. Sepulvida, suddenly facing her friend with an expression of mock gravity and humour, "this wont do! Who is that cavalier?"

With a terrible feeling that she was about to meet the keen eyes of Victor, Doña Dolores drew near the window from the side where she could look out without being herself seen. Her first glance at the figure of the stranger satisfied her that her fears were unfounded; it was not Victor. Reassured, she drew the curtain more boldly. At that instant the mysterious horseman wheeled, and she met full in her own the black eyes of Mr. Jack Hamlin. Doña Dolores instantly dropped the curtain and turned to her friend.

"I don't know!"

"Truly, Dolores?"

"Truly, Maria."

"Well, I believe you. I suppose then it must be *me!*"

Doña Dolores smiled, and playfully patted Mrs. Sepulvida's joyous face.

"Well then?" she said, invitingly.

"Well then," responded Mrs. Sepulvida, half in embarrassment and half in satisfaction.

"The news!" said Doña Dolores.

"O—well," said Mrs. Sepulvida, with mock deliberation, "it has come at last!"

"It has?" said Doña Dolores, looking gravely at her friend.

"Yes. He has been there again to-day."

"And he asked you," said Doña Dolores, opening her fan and turning her face toward the window.

"He asked me."

"And you said——"

Mrs. Sepulvida tripped gaily toward the window and looked out.

"I said——"

"What?"

"NO!"

BOOK V.

THE VEIN.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH GABRIEL RECOGNISES THE PROPRIETIES.

AFTER the visit of Mr. Peter Dumphy, One Horse Gulch was not surprised at the news of any stroke of good fortune. It was enough that he, the great capitalist, the successful speculator, had been there! The information that a company had been formed to develop a rich silver mine recently discovered on Conroy's Hill was received as a matter of course. Already the theories of the discovery were perfectly well-established. That it was simply a grand speculative *coup* of Dumphy's —that upon a boldly conceived plan this man intended to build up the town of One Horse Gulch—that he had invented "the lead" and backed it by an ostentatious display of capital in mills and smelting works

solely for a speculative purpose; that five years before he had selected Gabriel Conroy as a simple-minded tool for this design; that Gabriel's Two and One Half Millions was merely an exaggerated form of expressing the exact wages—One Thousand dollars a year, which was all Dumphy had paid him for the use of his name, and that it was the duty of every man to endeavour to realize quickly on the advance of property before this enormous bubble burst—this was the theory of one-half the people of One Horse Gulch. On the other hand, there was a large party who knew exactly the reverse. That the whole thing was purely accidental; that Mr. Peter Dumphy being called by other business to One Horse Gulch, while walking with Gabriel Conroy one day had picked up a singular piece of rock on Gabriel's claim, and had said, "this looks like silver;" that Gabriel Conroy had laughed at the suggestion, whereat Mr. Peter Dumphy, who never laughed, had turned about curtly and demanded in his usual sharp business way, "Will you take Seventeen Millions for all your right and title to this claim?" That

Gabriel—"you know what a blank fool Gabe is!"—had assented, "and this way, sir, actually disposed of a property worth, on the lowest calculation, One Hundred and Fifty Millions." This was the generally accepted theory of the other and more imaginative portion of One Horse Gulch.

Howbeit within the next few weeks following the advent of Mr. Dumphy, the very soil seemed to have quickened through that sunshine, and all over the settlement pieces of plank and scantling—thin blades of new dwellings—started up under that beneficent presence. On the bleak hill sides the more extensive foundations of the Conroy Smelting Works were laid. The modest boarding-house and restaurant of Mrs. Markle was found inadequate to the wants, and inconsistent with the greatness of One Horse Gulch, and a new hotel was erected. But here I am anticipating another evidence of progress—namely, the daily newspaper, in which these events were reported with a combination of ease and elegance one may envy yet never attain. Said the *Times*:—

"The Grand Conroy House, now being inaugurated, will be managed by Mrs. Susan Markle, whose talents as a *chef de cuisine* are as well known to One Horse Gulch as her rare social graces and magnificent personal charms. She will be aided by her former accomplished assistant, Miss Sarah Clark. As a hash-slinger, Sal can walk over anything of her weight in Plumas."

With these and other evidences of an improvement in public taste, the old baleful title of "One Horse Gulch" was deemed incongruous. It was proposed to change that name to "Silveropolis," there being, in the figurative language of the Gulch, "more than one horse could draw."

Meanwhile, the nominal and responsible position of Superintendent of the new works was filled by Gabriel, although the actual business and executive duty was performed by a sharp, snappy young fellow of about half Gabriel's size, supplied by the Company. This was in accordance with the wishes of Gabriel, who could not bear idleness; and

the Company, although distrusting his administrative ability, wisely recognised his great power over the workmen through the popularity of his easy democratic manners, and his disposition always to lend his valuable physical assistance in cases of emergency. Gabriel had become a great favourite with the men ever since they found that prosperity had not altered his simple nature. It was pleasant to them to be able to point out to a stranger this plain, unostentatious, powerful giant, working like themselves and with themselves, with the added information that he owned half the mine, and was worth Seventeen Millions! Always a shy and rather lonely man, his wealth seemed to have driven him, by its very oppressiveness, to the society of his humble fellows for relief. A certain deprecatoriness of manner whenever his riches were alluded to, strengthened the belief of some in that theory that he was merely the creature of Dumphy's speculation.

Although Gabriel was always assigned a small and insignificant part in the present

prosperity of One Horse Gulch, it was somewhat characteristic of the peculiar wrong-headedness of this community that no one ever suspected his wife of any complicity in it. It had been long since settled that her superiority to her husband was chiefly the feminine charm of social grace and physical attraction. That, warmed by the sunshine of affluence, this butterfly would wantonly flit from flower to flower, and eventually quit her husband and One Horse Gulch for some more genial clime, was never doubted. "She'll make them millions fly, ef she hez to fly with it," was the tenor of local criticism. A pity, not unmixed with contempt, was felt for Gabriel's apparent indifference to this prophetic outlook; his absolute insensibility to his wife's ambiguous reputation was looked upon as the hopelessness of a thoroughly deceived man. Even Mrs. Markle, whose attempts to mollify Olly had been received coldly by that young woman—even she was a convert to the theory of the complete domination of the Conroy household by this alien and stranger.

But despite this baleful prophecy, Mrs. Conroy did not fly nor show any inclination to leave her husband. A new house was built with that rapidity of production that belonged to the climate, among the pines of Conroy's Hill, which on the hottest summer day still exuded the fresh sap of its green timbers and exhaled a woodland spicery. Here the good taste of Mrs. Conroy flowered in chintz, and was always fresh and feminine in white muslin curtains and pretty carpets, and here the fraternal love of Gabriel brought a grand piano for the use of Olly, and a teacher. Hither also came the best citizens of the county—even the notabilities of the State—feeling that Mr. Dumphy had, to a certain extent, made One Horse Gulch respectable, soon found out also that Mrs. Conroy was attractive; the Hon. Blank had dined there on the occasion of his last visit to his constituents of the Gulch; the Hon. Judge Beeswinger had told in her parlour several of his most effective stories. Colonel Starbottle's manly breast had dilated over her dish-covers, and he had carried away with him not only a vivid appreciation of

her charms capable of future eloquent expression, but an equally vivid idea of his own fascinations, equally incapable of concealment. Gabriel himself rarely occupied the house except for the exigences of food and nightly shelter. If decoyed there at other times by specious invitation of Olly, he compromised by sitting on the back porch in his shirt sleeves, alleging as a reason his fear of the contaminating influence of his short black pipe.

"Don't ye mind *me*, July," he would say, when his spouse with anxious face and deprecatory manner would waive her native fastidiousness and aver that "she liked it." "Don't ye mind me, I admire to sit out yer. I'm a heap more comfortable outer doors, and allus waz. I reckon the smell might get into them curtings, and then — and then," added Gabriel, quietly ignoring the look of pleased expostulation with which Mrs. Conroy recognised this fancied recognition of her tastes, "and then *Olly's friends and thet teacher*, not being round like you and me allez and used to it, *they* mightn't like it. And I've heerd that the smell of

nigger-head terbacker do git inter the strings of a pianner and kinder stops the music. A pianner's a mighty cur'us thing. I've heerd say they're as dilikit and ailin' ez a child. Look in 'em and see them little strings a twistin' and crossin' each other like the reins of a six mule team, and it 'tain't no wonder they gets mixed up often."

It was not Gabriel's way to notice his wife's manner very closely, but if he had at that moment he might have fancied that there were other instruments whose fine chords were as subject to irritation and discordant disturbance. Perhaps only vaguely conscious of some womanish sullenness on his wife's part, Gabriel would at such times disengage himself as being the possible disorganizing element, and lounge away. His favourite place of resort was his former cabin, now tenantless and in rapid decay, but which he had refused to dispose of, even after the erection of his two later dwellings rendered it an unnecessary and unsightly encumbrance of his lands. He loved to linger by the deserted hearth and smoke his pipe in solitude, not from any sentiment,

conscious or unconscious, but from a force of habit, that was in this lonely man almost as pathetic.

He may have become aware at this time that a certain growing disparity of sentiment and taste which he had before noticed with a vague pain and wonder, rendered his gradual separation from Olly a necessity of her well-doing. He had indeed revealed this to her on several occasions with that frankness which was natural to him. He had apologized with marked politeness to her music teacher, who once invited him to observe Olly's proficiency, by saying in general terms that he "took no stock in chunes. I reckon it's about ez easy, Miss, if ye don't ring me in. Thet chile's got to get on without thinkin' o' me—or my 'pinion —allowin' it was wuth thinkin' on." Once meeting Olly walking with some older and more fashionable school friends whom she had invited from Sacramento, he had delicately avoided them with a sudden and undue consciousness of his great bulk, and his slow moving intellect, painfully sensitive to what seemed to him to be the preter-

natural quickness of the young people, and turned into a by-path.

On the other hand, it is possible that with the novelty of her new situation, and the increased importance that wealth brought to Olly, she had become more and more oblivious of her brother's feelings, and perhaps less persistent in her endeavours to draw him toward her. She knew that he had attained an equal importance among his fellows from this very wealth, and also a certain evident, palpable, superficial respect which satisfied her. With her restless ambition and the new life that was opening before her, his slower old-fashioned methods, his absolute rusticity—that day by day appeared more strongly in contrast to his surroundings—began to irritate where it had formerly only touched her sensibilities. From this irritation she at last escaped by the unfailing processes of youth and the fascination of newer impressions. And so day by day and hour by hour, they drifted slowly apart. Until one day Mrs. Conroy was pleasantly startled by an announcement from Gabriel, that he had completed ar-

rangements to send Olly to boarding-school in Sacramento. It was understood, also, that this was only a necessary preliminary to the departure of herself and husband for a long-promised tour of Europe.

As it was impossible for one of Gabriel's simple nature to keep his plans entirely secret, Olly was perfectly aware of his intention, and prepared for the formal announcement, which she knew would come in Gabriel's quaint serious way. In the critical attitude which the child had taken toward him, she was more or less irritated, as an older person might have been, with the air of grave cautiousness with which Gabriel usually explained that conduct and manner which was perfectly apparent and open from the beginning. It was during a long walk in which the pair had strayed among the evergreen woods, when they came upon the little dismantled cabin. Here Gabriel stopped. Olly glanced around the spot and shrugged her shoulders. Gabriel, more mindful of Olly's manner than he had ever been of any other of her sex, instantly understood it.

"It ain't a purty place, Olly," he began, rubbing his hands, "but we've had high ole times yer—you and me. Don't ye mind the nights I used to kem up from the gulch and pitch in to mendin' your gownds, Olly, and you asleep? Don't ye mind that—ar dress I copper fastened?" and Gabriel laughed loudly, and yet a little doubtfully.

Olly laughed too, but not quite so heartily as her brother, and cast her eyes down upon her own figure. Gabriel followed the direction of her glance. It was not perhaps easy to re-create in the figure before him the outré little waif who such a short time—such a long time—ago had sat at his feet in that very cabin. It is not alone that Olly was better dressed, and her hair more tastefully arranged, but she seemed in some way to have become more refined and fastidious—a fastidiousness that was plainly an outgrowth of something that she possessed but *he* did not. As he looked at her, another vague hope that he had fostered—a fond belief that as she grew taller she would come to look like Grace, and so revive the missing sister in his memory—this seemed

to fade away before him. Yet it was characteristic of the unselfishness of his nature, that he did not attribute this disappointment to her alone, but rather to some latent principle in human nature whereof he had been ignorant. He had even gone so far as to invite criticism on a hypothetical case from the sagacious Johnson. "It's the difference atween human natur and brute natur," that philosopher had answered promptly. "A purp's the same purp allez, even arter it's a grown dorg, but a child ain't—it's the difference atween reason and instink."

But Olly, to whom this scene recalled another circumstance, did not participate in Gabriel's particular reminiscence.

"Don't you remember, Gabe," she said, quickly, "the first night that sister July came here and stood right in that very door? Lord! how flabergasted we was to be sure! And if anybody'd told me, Gabe, that *she* was going to marry *you*—I'd, I'd a knocked 'em down," she blurted out, after hesitating for a suitable climax.

Gabriel, who in his turn did not seem to

be particularly touched with Olly's form of reminiscence, rose instantly above all sentiment in a consideration of the proprieties. "Ye shouldn't talk o' knockin' people down, Olly—it ain't decent for a young gal," he said, quickly. "Not that *I* mind it," he added, with his usual apology, "but allowin' that some of them purty little friends o' yours or teacher now, should hear ye! Sit down for a spell, Olly. I've suthin' to tell ye."

He took her hand in his, and made her sit beside him on the rude stone that served as the old doorstep of the cabin.

"Maybe ye might remember," he went on, lightly lifting her hand in his, and striking it gently across his knee to beget an easy confidential manner, "maybe ye might remember that I allers allowed to do two things ef ever I might make a strike—one was to give you a good schoolin'—the other was to find Grace, if so be as she was above the yearth. They waz many ways o' finding out—many way o' settin' at it, but they warn't *my* ways. I allus allowed that ef thet child waz in harkenin' distance o'

the reach o' my call, she'd hear me. I mout have took other men to help me—men ez was sharp in them things, men ez was in that trade—but I didn't. And why?"

Olly intimated by an impatient shake of her head that she didn't know.

"Because she was that shy and skary with strangers. Ye disremember how shy she was, Olly, in them days, for ye was too young to notice. And then, not bein' shy yourself, but sorter peart, free and promisskiss, ready and able to keep up your end of a conversation with anybody, and allus ez chipper as a jay-bird—why, ye don't kinder allow that fur Gracy as I do. And thar was reasons why that purty chile should be shy—reasons ye don't understand now, Olly, but reasons pow'ful and strong to sich a child as thet."

"Ye mean, Gabe," said the shamelessly direct Olly, "that she was bashful, hevin' ran away with her bo."

That perplexity which wiser students of human nature than Gabriel have experienced at the swift perception of childhood in regard to certain things left him speechless.

He could only stare hopelessly at the little figure before him.

"Well, wot did *you* do, Gabe? Go on!" said Olly, impatiently.

Gabriel drew a long breath.

"Thar bein' certing reasons why Gracy should be thet shy—reasons consarning propperty o' her deceased parients," boldly invented Gabriel, with a lofty ignoring of Olly's baser suggestion, "I reckoned that she should get the first word from *me* and not from a stranger. I knowed she warnt in Californy, or she'd hev seen them handbills I issued five years ago. What did I do? Thar is a paper wot's printed in New York, called the *Herald*. Thar is a place in that thar paper whar they print notisses to people that is fur, fur away. They is precious words from fathers to their sons, from husbands to their wives, from brothers to sisters, ez can't find each other, from——"

"From sweethearts to thar bo's," said Olly, briskly, "I know."

Gabriel paused in speechless horror.

"Yes," continued Olly. "They calls 'em

'Personals.' Lord! I know all 'bout them. Gals get bo's by them, Gabe!"

Gabriel looked up at the bright, arching vault above him. Yet it did not darken nor split into fragments. And he hesitated. Was it worth while to go on? Was there anything he could tell this terrible child—his own sister—which she did not already know better than he?

"I wrote one o' them Pursonals," he went on to say, doggedly, "in this ways." He paused, and fumbling in his waistcoat pocket finally drew out a well-worn newspaper slip, and straightening it with some care from its multitudinous enfoldings, read it slowly, and with that peculiar patronizing self-consciousness which distinguishes the human animal in the rehearsal of its literary composition.

"Ef G. C. will communicate with sufferin' and anxious friends, she will confer a favour on ole Gabe. I will come and see her, and Olly will rise up and welcome her. Ef G. C. is sick or don't want to come she will write to G. C. G. C. is same as usual, and so is Olly. All is well. Address G. C., One Horse Gulch, Californy—till further notiss."

"Read it over again," said Olly.

Gabriel did so, readily.

"Ain't it kinder mixed up with them G. C.'s?" queried the practical Olly.

"Not for she," responded Gabriel, quickly, "that's just what July said when I showed her the 'Pursonal.' But I sed to her as I sez to you, it taint no puzzle to Gracy. *She* knows ez our letters is the same. And ef it 'pears queer to strangers wots the odds? Thet's the idee ov a 'pursonal.' Howsomever, its all right, Olly. Fur," he continued, lowering his voice confidentially, and drawing his sister closer to his side—*it's bin ansered!*"

"By Grace?" asked Olly.

"No!" said Gabriel, in some slight confusion, "not by Grace, exactly—that is—but yer's the anser." He drew from his bosom a small chamois-skin purse, such as miners used for their loose gold, and extracted the more precious slip. "Read it," he said to Olly, turning away his head.

Olly eagerly seized and read the paper.

"G. C.—Look no more for the missing

one who will never return. Look at home. Be happy.—P. A."

Olly turned the slip over in her hands. "Is that all?" she asked in a higher key, with a rising indignation in her pink cheeks.

"That's all," responded Gabriel, "short and shy—that's Gracy, all over."

"Then all I got to say is it's mean!" said Olly, bringing her brown fist down on her knee. "And that's wot I'd say to that thar P. A.—that Philip Ashley—if I met him."

A singular look, quite unlike the habitual placid, good-humoured expression of the man, crossed Gabriel's face as he quietly reached out and took the paper from Olly's hand.

"Thet's why I'm goin' off," he said, simply.

"Goin' off," repeated Olly.

"Goin' off—to the States. To New York," he responded, "July and me. July sez—and she's a peart sort o' woman in her way, ef not o' your kind, Olly," he interpolated, apologetically, "but pow'ful to argyfy

and plan, and she allows ez New York 'ud nat'rally be the stampin' ground o' sich a high-toned feller ez him. And that's why I want to talk to ye, Olly. Thar's only two things ez 'ud ever part you and me, dear, and one on 'em ez this very thing—it's my dooty to Gracy, and the other ez my dooty to you. Et ain't to be expected that when you oughter be gettin' your edykation you'd be cavortin' round the world with me. And you'll stop yer at Sacramento in a A 1 first-class school, ontil I come back. Are ye hark'nin', dear?"

"Yes," said Olly, fixing her clear eyes on her brother.

"And ye ain't to worrit about me. And it 'ud be as well, Olly, ez you'd forget all 'bout this yer gulch, and the folks. Fur yer to be a lady, and in bein' thet brother Gabe don't want ennythin' to cross ye. And I want to say to thet feller, Olly, 'Ye ain't to jedge this yer fammerly by me, fur the men o' that fammerly gin'rally speakin' runs to size, and ain't, so to speak, strong up yer,'" continued Gabriel, placing his hands on his sandy curls; "'but thar's a little lady in

school in Californy ez is jest what Gracy would hev bin if she'd had the schoolin'. And ef ye wants to converse with her she kin give you pints enny time.' And then I brings you up, and nat'rally I reckon thet you ain't goin' back on brother Gabe—in 'stronomy, grammar, 'rithmetic and them things."

"But wot's the use of huntin' Grace if she says she'll never return?" said Olly, sharply.

"Ye musn't read them 'parsonals' ez ef they was square. They're kinder conundrums, ye know—puzzles. It says G. C. will never return. Well, 'spose G. C. has another name. Don't you see?"

"Married, maybe," said Olly, clapping her hands.

"Surely," said Gabriel, with a slight colour in his cheeks. "Thet's so."

"But s'pose it doesn't mean Grace after all?" persisted Olly.

Gabriel was for a moment staggered.

"But July sez it does," he answered, doubtfully.

Olly looked as if this evidence was not entirely satisfactory.

"But what does 'look at home' mean?" she continued.

"Thet's it," said Gabriel, eagerly. "Thet reads—'Look at little Olly—ain't she there?' And thet's like Gracy—allus thinkin' o' somebody else."

"Well," said Olly, "I'll stop yer, and let you go. But wot are *you* goin' to do without me?"

Gabriel did not reply. The setting sun was so nearly level with his eyes that it dazzled them, and he was fain to hide them among the clustering curls of Olly, as he held the girl's head in both his hands. After a moment he said—

"Do ye want to know why I like this old cabin and this yer chimbly, Olly?"

"Yes," said Olly, whose eyes were also affected by the sun, and who was glad to turn them to the object indicated.

"It ain't because you and me hez sot there many and many a day, fur that's suthin' that we ain't goin' to think about any more. It's because, Olly, the first lick I ever struck with a pick on this hill was just yer. And I raised this yer chimbly with the rock.

Folks thinks thet it was over yonder in the slope whar I struck the silver lead, thet I first druv a pick. But it warn't. And I sometimes think, Olly, thet I've had as much square comfort outer thet first lick ez I'll ever get outer the lead yonder. But come, Olly, come! July will be wonderin' whar you is, and ther's a stranger yonder comin' up the road, and I reckon I ain't ez fine a lookin' bo ez a young lady ez you ez, orter to co-mand. Never mind, Olly, he needn't know ez you and me is any relashuns. Come!"

In spite of Gabriel's precautionary haste, the stranger who was approaching by the only trail which led over the rocky hillside perceived the couple, and turned toward them interrogatively. Gabriel was forced to stop, not however without first giving a slight reassuring pressure to Olly's hand.

"Can you tell me the way to the hotel—the Grand Conroy House I think they call it?" the traveller asked, politely.

He would have been at any time an awe-inspiring and aggressive object to One Horse Gulch and to Gabriel, and at this particular

moment he was particularly discomposing. He was elaborately dressed, buttoned and patent-leather booted in the extreme limit of some bygone fashion, and had the added effrontery of spotless ruffled linen. As he addressed Gabriel he touched a tall black hat, sacred in that locality to clergymen and gamblers. To add to Gabriel's discomfiture, at the mention of the Grand Conroy House, he had felt Olly stiffen aggressively under his hand.

"Foller this yer trail to the foot of the hill, and ye'll strike Main Street, that'll fetch ye thar. I'd go with ye a piece, but I'm imployed," said Gabriel, with infinite tact and artfulness, accenting each word with a pinch of Olly's arm—"imployed by this yer young lady's friends to see her home, and bein' a partikler sort o' fammerly, they makes a row when I don't come reg'lar. Axin' your parding, don't they, Miss?" And to stop any possible retort from Olly before she could recover from her astonishment he had hurried her into the shadows of the evergreen pines of Conroy Hill.

CHAPTER II.

TRANSIENT GUESTS AT THE GRAND CONROY.

THE Grand Conroy Hotel was new, and had the rare virtue of comparative cleanliness. As yet the odours of bygone dinners, and forgotten suppers, and long dismissed breakfasts had not possessed and permeated its halls and passages. There was no distinctive flavour of preceding guests in its freshly clothed and papered rooms. There was a certain virgin coyness about it, and even the active ministration of Mrs. Markle and Sal was delicately veiled from the public by the interposition of a bar-keeper and Irish waiter. Only to a few of the former *habitués* did these ladies appear with their former frankness and informality. There was a public parlour, glittering with gilt framed mirrors and gorgeous with red plush furni-

ture, which usually froze the geniality of One Horse Gulch, and repressed its larger expression, but there was a little sitting-room beyond sacred to the widow and her lieutenant Sal, where visitors were occasionally admitted. Among the favoured few who penetrated this arcana was Lawyer Maxwell. He was a widower and was supposed to have a cynical distrust of the sex, that was at once a challenge to them and a source of danger to himself.

Mrs. Markle was of course fully aware that Mrs. Conroy had been Maxwell's client, and that it was while on a visit to him she had met with the accident that resulted in her meeting with Gabriel. Unfortunately Mrs. Markle was unable to entirely satisfy herself if there had been any previous acquaintance. Maxwell had declared to her that to the best of his knowledge there had been none, and that the meeting was purely accidental. He could do this without violating the confidence of his client, and it is fair to presume that upon all other matters he was loyally uncommunicative. That Madame Devarges had consulted him regarding a claim to

some property was the only information he imparted. In doing this, however, he once accidentally stumbled, and spoke of Mrs. Devarges as "Grace Conroy." Mrs. Markle instantly looked up. "I mean Mrs. Conroy," he said, hastily.

"Grace—that was his sister who was lost—wasn't it?"

"Yes," replied Maxwell, demurely, "did he ever talk much to you about her?"

"No-o," said Mrs. Markle, with great frankness, "he and me only talked on gin'ral topics; but from what Olly used to let on, I reckon that sister was the only woman he ever loved."

Lawyer Maxwell, who with an amused recollection of his extraordinary interview with Gabriel in regard to the woman before him, was watching her mischievously, suddenly became grave. "I guess you'll find, Mrs. Markle, that his present wife amply fills the place of his lost sister," he said, more seriously than he had intended.

"Never," said Mrs. Markle, quickly. "Not she—the designin', crafty hussy!"

"I am afraid you are not doing her

justice," said Maxwell, wiping away a smile from his lips, after his characteristic habit, "but then it's not strange that two, bright, pretty woman are unable to admire each other. What reason have you to charge *her* with being designing?" he asked again, with a sudden return of his former seriousness.

"Why, her marryin' him," responded Mrs. Markle, frankly; "look at that simple, shy, bashful critter, do you suppose he'd marry her—marry any woman—that didn't throw herself at his head, eh?"

Mrs. Markle's pique was so evident that even a philosopher like Maxwell could not content himself with referring it to the usual weakness of the sex. No man cares to have a woman exhibit habitually her weakness for another man, even when he possesses the power of restraining it. He answered somewhat quickly as he raised his hand to his mouth to wipe away the smile that, however, did not come. "But suppose that you—and others—are mistaken in Gabriel's character. Suppose all this simplicity and shyness is a mask. Suppose he is one of the most perfect and successful

actors on or off the stage. Suppose he should turn out to have deceived everybody —even his present wife!"—and Lawyer Maxwell stopped in time.

Mrs. Markle instantly fired. "Suppose fiddlesticks and flapjacks! I'd as soon think o' suspectin' thet child," she said, pointing to the unconscious Manty. "You lawyers are allus suspectin' what you can't understand!" She paused as Maxwell wiped his face again. "What do you mean anyway—why don't yer speak out? What do you know of him?"

"Oh, nothing! only it's as fair to say all this of him as of her—on about the same evidence. For instance here's a simple, ignorant fellow——"

"He ain't ignorant," interrupted Mrs. Markle, sacrificing argument to loyalty.

"Well, this grown up child! He discovers the biggest lead in One Horse Gulch, and manages to get the shrewdest financier in California to manage it for him, and that too after he has snatched up an heiress and a pretty woman before the rest of 'em got a sight of her. That may be simplicity; but

my experience of guilelessness is that, ordinarily, it isn't so lucky."

"They wont do him the least good, depend upon it," said Mrs. Markle, with the air of triumphantly closing the argument.

It is very possible that Mrs. Markle's dislike was sustained and kept alive by Sal's more active animosity, and the strict espionage that young woman kept over the general movements and condition of the Conroys. Gabriel's loneliness, his favourite haunt on the hillside, the number and quality of Mrs. Conroy's visitors, even fragments of conversation held in the family circle were all known to Sal, and re-delivered to Mrs. Markle with Sal's own colouring. It is possible that most of the gossip concerning Mrs. Conroy already hinted at had its origin in the views and observations of this admirable young woman, who did not confine her confidences entirely to her mistress. And when one day a stranger and guest, staying at the Grand Conroy House, sought to enliven the solemnity of breakfast by social converse with Sal regarding the

Conroys, she told him nearly everything that she had already told Mrs Markle.

I am aware that it is alleged that some fascinating quality in this stranger's manner and appearance worked upon the susceptible nature and loosened the tongue of this severe virgin, but beyond a certain disposition to minister personally to his wants, to hover around him archly with a greater quantity of dishes than that usually offered the transient guest, and to occasionally expatiate on the excellence of some extra viand, there was really no ground for the report. Certainly, the guest was no ordinary man; was quite unlike the regular *habitués* of the house, and perhaps to some extent justified this favouritism. He was young, sallow-faced, with very white teeth and skin, yellow hands, and a tropical, impulsive manner, which Miss Sarah Clark generally referred to as "Eyetalian." I venture to transcribe something of his outward oral expression.

"I care not greatly for the flapjack, nor yet for the dried apples," said Victor, whom the intelligent reader has at once recognised,

"but a single cup of coffee sweetened by those glances and offered by those fair hands —which I kiss!—are to me enough. And you think that the Meestrees Conroy does not live happily with her husband. Ah! you are wise, you are wise, Mees Clark, I would not for much money find myself under these criticism, eh?"

"Well, eyes bein' given to us to see with by the Lord's holy will, and it ain't for weak creeturs like us to misplace our gifts or magnify 'em," said Sal, in shrill, bashful confusion, allowing an underdone fried egg to trickle from the plate on the coat-collar of the unconscious Judge Beeswinger, "I do say when a woman sez to her husband, ez she's sworn to honour and obey, 'this yer's *my* house, and this yer's *my* land, and yer kin git,' thar ain't much show o' happiness thar. Ef it warn't for hearin' this with my own ears, bein' thar accidental like, and in a sogial way, I wouldn't hev believed it. And she allowin' to be a lady, and afeared to be civil to certain folks ez is ez good as she and far better, and don't find it necessary to git married to git a position—and could hev

done it a thousand times over ef so inclined. But folks is various and self praise is open disgrace. Let me recommend them beans. The pork, ez we allus kills ourselves fur the benefit o' transient gests, bein' a speciality."

"It is of your kindness, Mees Clark, I am already full. And of the pork I touch not, it is an impossibility," said Victor, showing every tooth in his head. "It is much painful to hear of this sad, sad affair. It is bad—and yet you say he has riches—this man. Ah! the what is the world. See, the great manner it has treated those! No, I will not more. I am sufficient now. Ah! eh! what have we here?"

He lowered his voice and eyes as a stranger—the antique dandy Gabriel had met on Conroy's hill the evening before, rose from some unnoticed seat at a side table, and unconcernedly moved away. Victor instantly recognised the card player of San Antonio, his former chance acquaintance of Pacific Street, and was filled with a momentary feeling of suspicion and annoyance. But Sal's *sotto voce* reply that the stranger was a witness attending court

seemed to be a reasonable explanation, and the fact that the translator did not seem to recognise him promptly relieved his mind. When he had gone Sal returned to her confidences: "Ez to his riches, them ez knows best hez their own say o' that. Thar was a party yer last week—gents ez was free with their money, and not above exchanging the time o' day with working folk, and though it ain't often ez me or Sue Markle dips into conversation with entire strangers, yet," continued Sal, with parenthetical tact and courtesy, "Eyetalians,—furriners in a strange land bein' an exception—and them gents let on that thet vein o' silver on Conroy's hill hed been surveyed and it wazent over a foot wide, and would be played out afore a month longer, and thet old Peter Dumphy knowed it, and hed sold out, and thet thet's the reason Gabriel Conroy was goin' off—jest to be out o' the way when the killapse comes."

"Gabriel! going away, Mees Sal? this is not possible!" ejaculated the fascinating guest, breathing very hard, and turning all his teeth in a single broadside upon

the susceptible handmaid. At any other moment, it is possible that Sal might have been suspicious of the stranger's excitement, but the fascination of his teeth held and possessed this fluttering virgin.

"Ef thar ever waz a man ez hed an angelic smile," she intimated afterwards in confidence to Mrs. Markle, "it waz thet young Eyetalian." She handed him several dishes, some of them empty, in her embarrassment, and rejoined with an affectation of arch indignation, "Thank ye fur sayin' 'I lie,'—and it's my pay fur bein' a gossip and ez good ez I send—but thar's Olympy Conroy packed away to school fur six months, and thar's the new superintendent ez is come up to take Gabriel's situation, and he a sittin' in a grey coat next to ye a minit ago! Eh? And ye wont take nothin' more? Appil or cranbear' pie?—our own make? I'm afeerd ye ain't made out a dinner!" But Victor had already risen hurriedly and departed, leaving Sal in tormenting doubt whether she had not in her coquettish indignation irritated the tropical nature of this sensitive Italian. "I orter allowed fur his bein' a

furriner and not bin so free. Pore young man! I thought he did luk tuk back when I jest allowed that he said I lied." And with a fixed intention of indicating her forgiveness and goodwill the next morning by an extra dish, Sal retired somewhat dejectedly to the pantry. She made a point, somewhat later, of dusting the hall in the vicinity of Victor's room, but was possibly disappointed to find the door open, and the tenant absent. Still later, she imparted some of this interview to Mrs. Markle with a certain air of fatigued politeness and a suggestion that, in the interest of the house solely, she had not repressed perhaps as far as maidenly pride and strict propriety demanded, the somewhat extravagant advances of the stranger. "I'm sure," she added, briskly, "why he kept a lookin' and a talkin' at me in that way, mind can't consave, and transients did notiss. And if he did go off mad, why, he kin git over it." Having thus delicately conveyed the impression of an ardent Southern nature checked in its exuberance, she became mysteriously reticent and gloomy.

It is probable that Miss Clark's theory of Gabriel's departure was not original with her, or entirely limited to her own experience. A very decided disapprobation of Gabriel's intended trip was prevalent in the gulches and bar-room. He quickly lost his late and hard-earned popularity; not a few questioned his moral right to leave One Horse Gulch until its property was put beyond a financial doubt in the future. The men who had hitherto ignored the proposition that he was in any way responsible for the late improvement in business, now openly condemned him for abandoning the position they declared he never had. The *Silveropolis Messenger* talked vaguely of the danger of "changing superintendents" at such a moment, and hinted that the stock of the company would suffer. The rival paper—for it was found that the interests of the town required a separate and distinct expression—had an editorial on "absenteeism," and spoke, crushingly, of those men who having enriched themselves out of the resources of One Horse Gulch, were now

seeking to dissipate that wealth in the excesses of foreign travel.

Meanwhile, the humble object of this criticism, oblivious in his humility of any public interest in his movements or intentions, busied himself in preparations for his departure. He had refused the offer of a large rent for his house from the new superintendent, but had retained a trusty servant to keep it with a view to the possible return of Grace. "Ef thar mout ever come a young gal yer lookin' fur me," he said privately to this servant, "yer not to ax any questions, partiklaly ef she looks sorter shy and bashful, but ye'll gin her the best room in the house, and send to me by igspress, and ye needn't say anythin' to Mrs. Conroy about it." Observing the expression of virtuous alarm on the face of the domestic—she was a married woman of some comeliness who was not living with her husband on account of his absurdly jealous disposition—he added hastily, "She's a young woman o' proputty ez hez troubil about it, and wishes to be kep' secret," and, having in this way

thoroughly convinced his handmaid of the vileness of his motives and the existence of a dark secret in the Conroy household, he said no more, but paid a flying visit to Olly, secretly, packed away all the remnants of his deceased mother's wardrobe, cut (God knows for what purpose) small patches from the few old dresses that Grace had worn that were still sacredly kept in his wardrobe, and put them in his pocket-book; wandered in his usual lonely way on the hillside, and spent solitary hours in his deserted cabin; avoided the sharp advances of Mrs. Markle, who once aggressively met him in his long post-prandial walks, as well as the shy propinquity of his wife, who would fain have delayed him in her bower, and so having after the fashion of his sex made the two women who loved him exceedingly uncomfortable, he looked hopefully forward to the time when he should be happy without either.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH MR. DUMPHY TAKES A HOLIDAY.

IT was a hot day on the California coast. In the memory of the oldest American inhabitant its like had not been experienced, and although the testimony of the Spanish Californian was deemed untrustworthy where the interests of the American people were concerned, the statement that for sixty years there had been no such weather was accepted without question. The additional fact, vouchsafed by Don Pedro Peralta, that the great earthquake which shook down the walls of the Mission of San Juan Bautista had been preceded by a week of such abnormal meteorology, was promptly suppressed as being of a quality calculated to check immigration. Howbeit it was hot. The usual afternoon

trade-winds had pretermitted their rapid, panting breath, and the whole coast lay, as it were, in the hush of death. The evening fogs that always had lapped the wind-abraded surfaces of the bleak seaward hills were gone too; the vast Pacific lay still and glassy, glittering, but intolerable. The outlying sand dunes, unmitigated by any breath of air, blistered the feet and faces of chance pedestrians. For once the broad verandahs, piazzas, and balconies of San Francisco cottage architecture were consistent and serviceable. People lingered upon them in shirt-sleeves, with all the exaggeration of a novel experience. French windows, that had always been barred against the fierce afternoon winds, were suddenly thrown open; that brisk, energetic step, with which the average San Franciscan hurried to business or pleasure, was changed to an idle, purposeless lounge. The saloons were crowded with thirsty multitudes, the quays and wharves with a people who had never before appreciated the tonic of salt air; the avenues leading over the burning sand-hills to the ocean all day were thronged with

vehicles. The numerous streets and by-ways, abandoned by their great scavenger, the wind, were foul and ill-smelling. For twenty-four hours business was partly forgotten; as the heat continued and the wind withheld its customary tribute, there were some changes in the opinions and beliefs of the people; doubts were even expressed of the efficacy of the climate; a few heresies were uttered regarding business and social creeds, and Mr. Dumphy and certain other financial magnates felt vaguely that if the thermometer continued to advance the rates of interest must fall correspondingly.

Equal to even this emergency, Mr. Dumphy had sat in his office all the morning, resisting with the full strength of his aggressive nature any disposition on the part of his customers to succumb financially to the unusual weather. Mr. Dumphy's shirt-collar was off; with it seemed to have departed some of his respectability, and he was perhaps, on the whole, a trifle less imposing than he had been. Nevertheless, he was still dominant, in the suggestion of his short bull neck, and two visitors who entered,

observing the *déshabillé* of this great man, felt that it was the proper thing for them to instantly unbutton their own waistcoats and loosen their cravats.

"It's hot," said Mr. Pilcher, an eminent contractor.

"You bet!" responded Mr. Dumphy. "Must be awful on the Atlantic coast! People dying by hundreds of sunstroke; that's the style out there. Here, there's nothing of the kind! A man stands things here that he couldn't there."

Having thus re-established the supremacy of the California climate, Mr. Dumphy came directly to business. "Bad news from One Horse Gulch!" he said, quickly.

As that was the subject his visitors came to speak about—a fact of which Mr. Dumphy was fully aware—he added, sharply, "What do you propose?"

Mr. Pilcher, who was a large stockholder in the Conroy mine, responded, hesitatingly, "We've heard that the lead opens badly."

"D——n bad!" interrupted Dumphy. "What do you propose?"

"I suppose," continued Mr. Pilcher, "the

only thing to do is to get out of it before the news becomes known."

"No!" said Dumphy, promptly. The two men stared at each other. "No!" he continued, with a quick, short laugh, which was more like a logical expression than a mirthful emotion. "No, we must hold on, sir! Look yer! there's a dozen men as you and me know, that we could unload to-morrow. Suppose we did? Well, what happens? They go in on four hundred thousand—that's about the figures we represent. Well. They begin to examine and look around; them men, Pilcher"—(in Mr. Dumphy's more inspired moods he rose above considerations of the English grammar)—"them men want to know what that four hundred thousand's invested in; they ain't goin' to take our word after we've got their money—that's human nature—and in twenty-four hours they find they're sold! That don't look well for me nor you—does it?"

There was not the least assumption of superior honour or integrity—indeed, scarcely any self-consciousness or sentiment of any kind, implied in this speech—yet it

instantly affected both of these sharp business men, who might have been suspicious of sentiment, with an impression of being both honourable and manly. Mr. Pilcher's companion, Mr. Wyck, added a slight embarrassment to his reception of these great truths, which Mr. Dumphy noticed.

"No," he went on; "what we must do is this. Increase the capital stock just as much again. That will enable us to keep everything in our hands—news and all—and if it should leak out afterwards, we have half a dozen others with us to keep the secret. Six months hence will be time to talk of selling; just now buying is the thing! You don't believe it?—eh? Well, Wyck, I'll take yours at the figure you paid. What do you say?—quick!"

Mr. Wyck, more confused than appeared necessary, declared his intention of holding on; Mr. Pilcher laughed. Mr. Dumphy barked behind his hand.

"That offer's open for ninety days—will you take it? No! Well, then, that's all!" and Mr. Dumphy turned again to his desk.

Mr. Pilcher took the hint, and drew Mr. Wyck away.

"Devilish smart chap, that Dumphy!" said Pilcher, as they passed out of the door.

"An honest man, by ——" responded Wyck.

When they had gone Mr. Dumphy rang his bell. "Ask Mr. Jaynes to come and see me at once. D——n it, go now! You must get there before Wyck does. Run!"

The clerk disappeared. In a few moments Mr. Jaynes, a sharp but very youthful looking broker entered the office parlour. "Mr. Wyck will want to buy back that stock he put in your hands this morning, Jaynes. I thought I'd tell you, it's worth 50 advance now!"

The precocious youth grinned intelligently and departed. By noon of that day it was whispered that notwithstanding the rumours of unfavourable news from the Conroy mine, one of the heaviest stockholders had actually bought back, at an advance of $50 per share, some stock he had previously sold. More than that, it

was believed that Mr. Dumphy had taken advantage of these reports, and was secretly buying. In spite of the weather, for some few hours there had been the greatest excitement.

Possibly from some complacency arising from this, possibly from some singular relaxing in the atmosphere, Mr. Dumphy at two o'clock shook off the cares of business and abandoned himself to recreation—refusing even to take cognizance of the card of one Colonel Starbottle, which was sent to him with a request for an audience. At half-past two he was behind a pair of fast horses, one of a carriage-load of ladies and gentlemen, rolling over the scorching sand-hills towards the Pacific, that lay calm and cool beyond. As the well-appointed equipage rattled up the Bush Street Hill, many an eye was turned with envy and admiration toward it. The spectacle of two pretty women among the passengers was perhaps one reason, the fact that everybody recognised in the showy and brilliant driver, the celebrated Mr. Rollingstone, an able financier and rival of Mr. Dumphy's, was

perhaps equally potent. For Mr. Rollingstone was noted for his "turnout," as well as for a certain impulsive South Sea extravagance and picturesque hospitality which Dumphy envied and at times badly imitated. Indeed, the present excursion was one of Mr. Rollingstone's famous *fêtes champêtres*, and the present company was composed of the *élite* of San Francisco, and made self-complacent and appreciative by an enthusiastic Eastern tourist.

Their way lay over shifting sand dunes, now motionless and glittering in the cruel, white glare of a Californian sky, only relieved here and there by glimpses of the blue bay beyond, and odd marine-looking buildings, like shells scattered along the beach, as if they had been cast up and forgotten by some heavy tide. Further on, their road skirted the base of a huge solitary hill, broken in outline by an outcrop of gravestones, sacred to the memory of worthy pioneers who had sealed their devotion to the "healthiest climate in the world" with their lives. Occasionally these gravestones continued to the foot of the hill, where,

struggling with the drifting sand, they suggested a half-exhumed Pompeii to the passing traveller. They were the skeletons at the feast of every San Francisco pleasure-seeker, the *memento mori* of every picnicing party, and were visible even from the broad verandahs of the suburban pavilions, where the gay and thoughtless citizen ate, drank, and was merry. Part of the way the busy avenue was parallel with another, up which, even at such times, occasionally crept the lugubrious procession of hearse and mourning coach to other pavilions, scarcely less crowded, where there were "funeral baked meats," and sorrow and tears. And beyond this again was the grey eternal sea, and at its edge, perched upon a rock, and rising out of the very jaws of the gushing breakers, a stately pleasure dome, decreed by some speculative and enterprising San Francisco landlord—the excuse and terminus of this popular excursion.

Here Rollingstone drew up, and alighting, led his party into a bright, cheery room, whose windows gave upon the sea. A few other guests, evidently awaiting them,

were mitigating their impatience by watching the uncouth gambols of the huge sea-lions, who, on the rocks beyond, offered a contrast to the engaging and comfortable interior that was at once pleasant and exciting. In the centre of the room a table overloaded with overgrown fruits and grossly large roses somewhat ostentatiously proclaimed the coming feast.

"Here we are!" said Mr. Dumphy, bustling into the room with that brisk, business-like manner which his friends fondly believed was frank cheerfulness, "and on time, too!" he added, drawing out his watch. "Inside of thirty minutes—how's that, eh?" He clapped his nearest neighbour on the back, who, pleased with this familiarity from a man worth five or six millions, did not stop to consider the value of this celerity of motion in a pleasure excursion on a hot day.

"Well!" said Rollingstone, looking around him, "you all know each other, I reckon, or will soon. Mr. Dumphy, Mr. Poinsett, Mr. Pilcher, Mr. Dyce, Mr. Wyck, Mrs. Sepulvida and Miss Rosey Ringround,

gentlemen; Mr. and Mrs. Raynor, of Boston. There, now, that's through! Dinner's ready. Sit down anywhere and wade in. No formality, gentlemen—this is California."

There was, perhaps, some advantage in this absence of ceremony. The guests almost involuntarily seated themselves according to their preferences, and Arthur Poinsett found himself beside Mrs. Sepulvida, while Mr. Dumphy placed Miss Ringround — a pretty though boyish-looking blonde, slangy in speech and fashionable in attire—on his right hand.

The dinner was lavish and luxurious, lacking nothing but restraint and delicacy. There was game in profusion, fat but flavourless. The fruits were characteristic. The enormous peaches were blowsy in colour and robust in fibre; the pears were prodigious and dropsical, and looked as if they wanted to be tapped; the strawberries were overgrown and yet immature—rather as if they had been arrested on their way to become pineapples; with the exception of the grapes, which were delicate in colour and texture, the fruit might have been an

ironical honouring by nature of Mr. Dumphy's lavish drafts.

It is probable, however, that the irony was lost on the majority of the company, who were inclined to echo the extravagant praise of Mr. Raynor, the tourist. "Wonderful! wonderful!" said that gentleman; "if I had not seen this I wouldn't have believed it. Why, that pear would make four of ours."

"That's the way we do things here," returned Dumphy, with the suggestion of being personally responsible for these abnormal growths. He stopped suddenly, for he caught Arthur Poinsett's eye. Mr. Dumphy ate little in public, but he was at that moment tearing the wing of a grouse with his teeth, and there was something so peculiar and characteristic in the manner that Arthur looked up with a sudden recollection in his glance. Dumphy put down the wing, and Poinsett resumed his conversation with Mrs. Sepulvida. It was not of a quality that interruption seriously impaired; Mrs. Sepulvida was a charming but not an intellectual woman, and Mr. Poinsett

took up the lost thread of his discourse quite as readily from her eyes as her tongue.

"To have been consistent, Nature should have left a race of giants here," said Mr. Poinsett, meditatively. "I believe," he added, more pointedly, and in a lower voice, "the late Don José was not a large man."

"Whatever he was, he thought a great deal of me!" pouted Mrs. Sepulvida. Mr. Poinsett was hastening to say that if "taking thought" like that could add a "cubit to one's stature," he himself was in a fair way to become a son of Anak, when he was interrupted by Miss Rosey. "What's all that about big men? There are none here. They're like the big trees. They don't hang around the coast much! You must go to the mountains for your Goliahs."

Emboldened quite as much by the evident annoyance of her neighbour as the amused look of Arthur Poinsett, she went on, "I have seen the pre-historic man!—the original athletic sharp! He is seven feet high, is as heavy as a sea-lion, and has shoulders like

Tom Hyer. He slings an awful left. He's got blue eyes as tender as a seal's. He has hair like Samson before that woman went back on him. He's as brave as a lion and as gentle as a lamb. He blushes like a girl, or as girls used to; I wish I could start up such a colour on even double the provocation."

Of course everybody laughed—it was the usual tribute to Miss Rosey's speech—the gentlemen frankly and fairly, the ladies perhaps a little doubtfully and fearfully. Mrs. Sepulvida, following the amused eyes of Arthur, asked Miss Rosey patronizingly where she had seen her phenomenon.

"Oh, it's no use, my dear, positively—no use. He's married. These phenomena always get married. No, I didn't see him in a circus, Mr. Dumphy, nor in a menagerie, Mr. Dyce, but in a girl's school!"

Everybody stared; a few laughed as if this were an amusing introduction to some possible joke from Miss Rosey.

"I was visiting an old schoolmate at Madame Eclair's *Pension* at Sacramento; he was taking his little sister to the same

school," she went on, coolly, "so he told me. I love my love with a G, for he is Guileless and Gentle. His name is Gabriel, and he lives in a Gulch."

"Our friend the superintendent—I'm blessed," said Dyce, looking at Dumphy.

"Yes; but not so very guileless," said Pilcher, "eh, Dyce?"

The gentlemen laughed; the ladies looked at each other and then at Miss Ringround. That fearless young woman was equal to the occasion.

"What have you got against my giant? Out with it!"

"Oh, nothing," said Mr. Pilcher; "only your guileless, simple friend has played the sharpest game on record in Montgomery Street."

"Go on!" said Miss Rosey.

"Shall I?" asked Pilcher of Dumphy.

Dumphy laughed his short laugh. "Go on."

Thus supported, Mr. Pilcher assumed the ease of a graceful *raconteur*. "Miss Rosey's guileless friend, ladies and gentlemen, is the

superintendent and shareholder in a certain valuable silver mine in which Dumphy is largely represented. Being about to leave the country, and anxious to realize on his stock, he contracted for the sale of a hundred shares at $1000 each, with our friend Mr. Dyce, the stocks to be delivered on a certain date—ten days ago. Instead of the stock, that day comes a letter from Conroy—a wonderful piece of art—simple, ill-spelled, and unbusiness-like, saying, that in consequence of recent disappointment in the character and extent of the lead, he shall not hold Dyce to his contract, but will release him. Dyce, who has already sold that identical stock at a pretty profit, rushes off to Dumphy's broker, and finds two hundred shares held at $1200. Dyce smells a large-sized rat, writes that he shall hold Gabriel to the performance of his contract, makes him hand over the stock, delivers it in time, and then loads up again with the broker's 200 at $1200 *for a rise.* That rise don't come—wont come—for that sale was *Gabriel's too*—as Dumphy can tell you.

There's guilelessness! There's simplicity! And it cleared a hundred thousand by the operation."

Of the party none laughed more heartily than Arthur Poinsett. Without analysing his feelings he was conscious of being greatly relieved by this positive evidence of Gabriel's shrewdness. And when Mrs. Sepulvida touched his elbow, and asked if this were not the squatter who held the forged grant, Arthur, without being conscious of any special meanness, could not help replying with unnecessary significance that it was.

"I believe the whole dreadful story that Doña Dolores told me," said she, "how he married the woman who personated his sister, and all that—the deceitful wretch."

"I've got that letter here," continued Mr. Pilcher, drawing from his pocket a folded sheet of letter paper. "It's a curiosity. If you'd like to see the documentary evidence of your friend's guilelessness, here it is," he added, turning to Miss Ringround.

Miss Rosey took the paper defiantly, and unfolded it, as the others gathered round

her, Mr. Dumphy availing himself of that opportunity to lean familiarly over the arm of her chair. The letter was written with that timid, uncertain ink, peculiar to the illiterate effort, and suggestive of an occasional sucking of the pen in intervals of abstraction or difficult composition. Saving that characteristic, it is reproduced literally below :—

"1, Hoss Gulch,
"Argus the 10th.

"DEAR SIR,—On acount of thar heving ben bad Luck in the Leed witch has droped, I rite thes few lins hopping you air Well. I have to say we are disapinted in the Leed, it is not wut we thougt it was witch is wy I rite thes few lins. now sir purheps you ixpict me to go on with our contrak, and furniss you with 100 shars at 1 Thousin dolls pur shar. It issint wuth no 1 Thousin dols pur shar, far frummit. No sir, it issint, witch is wy I rite you thes few lins, and it Woddent be Rite nor squar for me to tak it. This is to let you off Mister Dyce, and hopin it ant no trubbil to ye, fur I shuddint sell atal things lookin this bad it not bein

rite nor squar, and hevin' tor up the contrak atween you and me. So no more at pressen from yours respectfuly

"G. CONROY.

"P.S.—You might mind my sayin to you about my sister witch is loss sens 1849. If you happind to com acrost any Traks of hers, me bein' away, you can send the sam to me in Care of Wels Farko & Co., New York Citty, witch is a grate favor and will be pade sure.

"G. C."

"I don't care what you say, that's an honest letter," said Miss Rosey, with a certain decision of character new to the experience of her friends, "as honest and simple as ever was written. You can bet your pile on that."

No one spoke, but a smile of patronizing superiority and chivalrous toleration was exchanged by all the gentlemen except Poinsett. Mr. Dumphy added to his smile his short characteristic bark. At the reference to the writer's sister, Mrs. Sepulvida

shrugged her pretty shoulders and looked doubtingly at Poinsett. But to her great astonishment that gentleman reached across the table, took the letter, and having glanced over it, said positively, "You are right, Miss Rosey, it is genuine"

It was characteristic of Poinsett's inconsistency that this statement was as sincere as his previous assent to the popular suspicion. When he took the letter in his hand, he at once detected the evident sincerity of its writer, and as quickly recognised the quaint honesty and simple nature of the man he had known. It was Gabriel Conroy, all over. More than that, he even recalled an odd memory of Grace in this frank directness and utter unselfishness of the brother who so plainly had never forgotten her. That all this might be even reconcilable with the fact of his marriage to the woman who had personated the sister, Arthur easily comprehended. But that it was his own duty, after he had impugned Gabriel's character, to make any personal effort to clear it, was not so plain. Nevertheless, he did not answer Mrs. Sepulvida's

look, but walked gravely to the window, and looked out upon the sea. Mr. Dumphy who, with the instincts of jealousy, saw in Poinsett's remark only a desire to ingratiate himself with Miss Rosey, was quick to follow his lead.

"It's a clear case of *quien sabe* anyway," he said to the young lady, "and maybe you're right. Joe, pass the champagne."

Dyce and Pilcher looked up inquiringly at their leader, who glanced meaningly toward the open-mouthed Mr. Raynor, whose astonishment at this sudden change in public sentiment was unbounded.

"But look here," said that gentleman, "bless my soul! if this letter is genuine, your friends here—these gentlemen—have lost a hundred thousand dollars! Don't you see? If this news is true, and this man's information is correct, the stock really isn't worth——"

He was interrupted by a laugh from Messrs. Dyce and Pilcher.

"That's so. It would be a devilish good

thing on Dyce!" said the latter, good-humouredly. "And as I'm in myself about as much again, I reckon I should take the joke about as well as he."

"But," continued the mystified Mr. Raynor, "do you really mean to say that you have any idea this news is true?"

"Yes," responded Pilcher, coolly.

"Yes," echoed Dyce, with equal serenity.

"You do?"

"We do."

The astonished tourist looked from the one to the other with undisguised wonder and admiration, and then turned to his wife. Had she heard it? Did she fully comprehend that here were men accepting and considering an actual and present loss of nearly a quarter of a million of dollars, as quietly and indifferently as if it were a postage stamp? What superb coolness! What magnificent indifference! What supreme and royal confidence in their own resources. Was this not a country of gods? All of which was delivered in a voice that,

although pitched to the key of matrimonial confidence, was still entirely audible to the gods themselves.

"Yes, gentlemen," continued Pilcher; "it's the fortune of war. T'other man's turn to-day, ours to-morrow. Can't afford time to be sorry in this climate. A man's born again here every day. Move along and pass the bottle."

What was that?

Nothing apparently, but a rattling of windows and shaking of the glasses—the effect of a passing carriage or children running on the piazza without. But why had they all risen with a common instinct, and with faces bloodless and eyes fixed in horrible expectancy? These were the questions which Mr. and Mrs. Raynor asked themselves hurriedly, unconscious of danger, yet with a vague sense of alarm at the terror so plainly marked upon the countenances of these strange, self-poised people, who, a moment before, had seemed the incarnation of reckless self-confidence, and inaccessible to the ordinary annoyances of mortals. And why were these other

pleasure-seekers rushing by the windows, and was not that a lady fainting in the hall? Arthur was the first to speak and tacitly answer the unasked question.

"It was from east to west," he said, with a coolness that he felt was affected, and a smile that he knew was not mirthful. "It's over now, I think." He turned to Mrs. Sepulvida, who was very white. "You are not frightened? Surely this is nothing new to you? Let me help you to a glass of wine."

Mrs. Sepulvida took it with a hysterical little laugh. Mrs. Raynor, who was now conscious of a slight feeling of nausea, did not object to the same courtesy from Mr. Pilcher, whose hand shook visibly as he lifted the champagne. Mr. Dumphy returned from the doorway, in which, to his own and everybody's surprise, he was found standing, and took his place at Miss Rosey's side. The young woman was first to recover her reckless hilarity.

"It was a judgment on you for slandering Nature's noblest specimen," she said, shaking her finger at the capitalist.

Mr. Rollingstone, who had returned to the head of his table, laughed.

"But *what* was it?" gasped Mr. Raynor, making himself at last heard above the somewhat pronounced gaiety of the party.

"An earthquake," said Arthur, quietly.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. DUMPHY HAS NEWS OF A DOMESTIC CHARACTER.

"AN earthquake!" echoed Mr. Rollingstone, cheerfully, to his guests; "now you've had about everything we have to show. Don't be alarmed, madam," he continued to Mrs. Raynor, who was beginning to show symptoms of hysteria, "nobody ever was hurt by 'em."

"In two hundred years there hasn't been as many persons killed by earthquakes in California as are struck by lightning on your coast in a single summer," said Mr. Dumphy.

"Never have 'em any stronger than this," said Mr. Pilcher, with a comforting suggestion of there being an absolute

limitation of Nature's freaks on the Pacific coast.

"Over in a minute, as you see," said Mr. Dumphy, "and—hello! what's that?"

In a moment they were on their feet, pale and breathless again. This time Mr. Raynor and his wife among the number. But it was only a carriage—driving away.

"Let us adjourn to the piazza," said Mr. Dumphy, offering his arm to Mrs. Raynor with the air of having risen solely for that purpose.

Mr. Dumphy led the way, and the party followed with some celerity. Mrs. Sepulvida hung back a moment with Arthur, and whispered—

"Take me back as soon as you can!"

"You are not seriously alarmed?" asked Arthur.

"We are too near the sea here," she replied, looking toward the ocean with a slight shudder. "Don't ask questions now," she added, a little sharply. "Don't you see these eastern people are frightened to death, and they may overhear."

But Mrs. Sepulvida had not long to wait,

for in spite of the pointed asseverations of Messrs. Pilcher, Dyce, and Dumphy, that earthquakes were not only harmless, but absolutely possessed a sanitary quality, the piazzas were found deserted by the usual pleasure-seekers, and even the eloquent advocates themselves betrayed some impatience to be once more on the open road.

A brisk drive of an hour put the party again in the highest spirits, and Mr. and Mrs. Raynor again into the condition of chronic admiration and enthusiasm.

Mrs. Sepulvida and Mr. Poinsett followed in an open buggy behind. When they were fairly upon their way, Arthur asked an explanation of his fair companion's fear of the sea.

"There is an old story," said Doña Maria, "that the Point of Pines—you know where it is, Mr. Poinsett—was once covered by a great wave from the sea that followed an earthquake. But tell me, do you really think that letter of this man Conroy is true?"

"I do," said Arthur, promptly.

"And that—there—is—a—prospect—

that—the—stock of this big mine may—de—pre—ciate in value?"

"Well—possibly—yes!"

"And if you knew that I had been foolish enough to put a good deal of money in it, you would still talk to me as you did the other day,—down there?"

"I should say," responded Arthur, changing the reins to his left hand that his right might be free for some purpose—goodness knows what!—"I should say that I am more than ever convinced that you ought to have some person to look after you."

What followed this remarkable speech I really do not know how to reconcile with the statement that Mrs. Sepulvida made to the Doña Dolores a few chapters ago, and I therefore discreetly refrain from transcribing it here. Suffice it to say that the buggy did not come up with the *char-à-banc* and the rest of the party until long after they had arrived at Mr. Dumphy's stately mansion on Rincon Hill, where another costly and elaborate collation was prepared. Mr. Dumphy evidently was in spirits, and

had so far overcome his usual awe and distrust of Arthur, as well as the slight jealousy he had experienced an hour or so before, as to approach that gentleman with a degree of cheerful familiarity that astonished and amused the self-sustained Arthur—who perhaps at that time had more reason for his usual conceit than before. Arthur, who knew, or thought he knew that Miss Ring-round was only coquetting with Mr. Dumphy for the laudable purpose of making the more ambitious of her sex miserable, and that she did not care for his person or position, was a good deal amused at finding the young lady the subject of Mr. Dumphy's sudden confidences.

"You see, Poinsett, as a man of business I don't go as much into society as you do, but she seems to be a straight up and down girl, eh?" he queried, as they stood together in the vestibule after the ladies had departed. It is hardly necessary to say that Arthur was positive and sincere in his praise of the young woman. Mr. Dumphy by some obscure mental process, taking much of the praise to himself, was highly elated and per-

haps tempted to a greater vinous indulgence than was his habit. Howbeit the last bottle of champagne seemed to have obliterated all past suspicion of Arthur, and he shook him warmly by the hand. "I tell ye what now, Poinsett, if there are any points I can give you don't you be afraid to ask for 'em. I can see what's up between you and the widow—honour you know—all right, my boy—she's in the Conroy lode pretty deep, but I'll help her out and you too! You've got a good thing there—Poinsett—and I want you to realize. We understand each other, eh? You'll find me a square man with my friends, Poinsett. Pitch in—pitch in!—my advice to you is to just pitch in and marry the widow. She's worth it—you can realize on her. You see you and me's—so to speak—ole pards, eh? You rek'leck ole times on Sweetwater, eh? Well—if you mus' go, goo'-bi! I s'pose she's waitin' for ye. Look you, Poinsy, d'ye see this yer posy in my buttonhole? She give it to me. Rosey did! eh? ha! ha! Wont tak' nothin' drink? Lesh open n'or bo'll. No? Goori!" until struggling between

disgust, amusement, and self-depreciation Arthur absolutely tore himself away from the great financier and his degrading confidences.

When Mr. Dumphy staggered back into his drawing-room, a servant met him with a card.

"The gen'lman says it's very important business, and he must see you to-night," he said, hastily, anticipating the oath and indignant protest of his master. "He says it's your business, sir, and not his. He's been waiting here since you came back, sir."

Mr. Dumphy took the card. It bore the inscription in pencil, "Colonel Starbottle, Siskiyou, on important business." Mr. Dumphy reflected a moment. The magical word "business" brought him to himself. "Show him in—in the office," he said, savagely, and retired thither.

Anybody less practical than Peter Dumphy would have dignified the large showy room in which he entered as the library. The rich mahogany shelves were filled with a heterogeneous collection of recent books, very fresh, very new and glaring as to binding

and subject; the walls were hung with files of newspapers and stock reports. There was a velvet-lined cabinet containing minerals—all of them gold or silver bearing. There was a map of an island that Mr. Dumphy owned—there was a marine view, with a representation of a steamship also owned by Mr. Dumphy. There was a momentary relief from these facts in a very gorgeous and badly painted picture of a tropical forest and sea beach, until inquiry revealed the circumstance that the sugar house in the corner under a palm tree was "run" by Mr. Dumphy, and that the whole thing could be had for a bargain.

The stranger who entered was large and somewhat inclined to a corpulency that was, however, restrained in expansion by a blue frock coat, tightly buttoned at the waist, which had the apparent effect of lifting his stomach into the higher thoracic regions of moral emotion—a confusion to which its owner lent a certain intellectual assistance. The Colonel's collar was very large, open and impressive; his black silk neckerchief loosely tied around his throat, occupying

considerable space over his shirt front and expanding through the upper part of a gilt-buttoned white waistcoat, lent itself to the general suggestion that the Colonel had burst his sepals and would flower soon. Above this unfolding the Colonel's face, purple, aquiline-nosed, throttle-looking as to the eye, and moist and sloppy looking as to the mouth, uptilted above his shoulders. The Colonel entered with that tiptoeing celerity of step affected by men who are conscious of increasing corpulency. He carried a cane hooked over his forearm ; in one hand a large white handkerchief, and in the other a broad-brimmed hat. He thrust the former gracefully in his breast, laid the latter on the desk where Mr. Dumphy was seated, and taking an unoffered chair himself, coolly rested his elbow on his cane in an attitude of easy expectancy.

"Say you've got important business?" said Dumphy. "Hope it is, sir—hope it is! Then out with it. Can't afford to waste time any more here than at the Bank. Come! What is it?"

Not in the least affected by Mr. Dumphy's

manner, whose habitual brusqueness was intensified to rudeness, Colonel Starbottle drew out his handkerchief, blew his nose, carefully returned apparently only about two inches of the cambric to his breast, leaving the rest displayed like a ruffled shirt, and began with an airy gesture of his fat white hand.

"I was here two hours ago, sir, when you were at the—er—festive board. I said to the boy, 'don't interrupt your master. A gentleman worshipping at the shrine of Venus and Bacchus and attended by the muses and immortals, don't want to be interrupted.' Ged, sir, I knew a man in Louisiana—Hank Pinckney—shot his boy—a little yellow boy worth a thousand dollars—for interrupting him at a poker party—and no ladies present! And the boy only coming in to say that the gin house was in flames. Perhaps you'll say an extreme case. Know a dozen such. So I said, 'Don't interrupt him, but when the ladies have risen, and Beauty, sir, no longer dazzles and—er—gleams, and the table round no longer echoes the—er—light jest, then spot him! And over the deserted

board, with—er—social glass between us, your master and I will have our little confab.'"

He rose, and before the astonished Dumphy could interfere, crossed over to a table where a decanter of whisky and a carafe of water stood, and filling a glass half-full of liquor, reseated himself and turned it off with an easy yet dignified inclination towards his host.

For once only Mr. Dumphy regretted the absence of dignity in his own manner. It was quite evident that his usual brusqueness was utterly ineffective here, and he quickly recognised in the Colonel the representative of a class of men well known in California, from whom any positive rudeness would have provoked a demand for satisfaction. It was not a class of men that Mr. Dumphy had been in the habit of dealing with, and he sat filled with impotent rage, but wise enough to restrain its verbal expression, and thankful that none of his late guests were present to witness his discomfiture. Only one good effect was due to his visitor. Mr. Dumphy through baffled indignation and shame had become sober.

"No, sir," continued Colonel Starbottle, setting his glass upon his knee, and audibly smacking his large lips. "No, sir. I waited in the—er—ante-chamber until I saw you part with your guests—until you bade—er—adieu to a certain fair nymph—Ged, sir, I like your taste, and I call myself a judge of fine women—'Blank it all,' I said to myself, 'Blank it all, Star, you ain't goin' to pop out upon a man just as he's ministering to Beauty and putting a shawl upon a pair of alabaster shoulders like that!' Ha! ha! Ged, sir, I remembered myself that in '43 in Washington at a party at Tom Benton's I was in just such a position, sir. 'Are you never going to get that cloak on Star?' she says to me—the most beautiful creature, the acknowledged belle of that whole winter—'43, sir—as a gentleman yourself you'll understand why I don't particularize—'If I had my way, madam,' I said, 'I never would!' I did, blank me. But you're not drinking, Mr. Dumphy, eh? A thimbleful, sir, to our better acquaintance."

Not daring to trust himself to speak, Mr. Dumphy shook his head somewhat impa-

tiently, and Colonel Starbottle rose. As he did so it seemed as if his shoulders had suddenly become broader and his chest distended until his handkerchief and white waistcoat protruded through the breast of his buttoned coat like a bursting grain of "pop corn." He advanced slowly and with deliberate dignity to the side of Dumphy.

"If I have intruded upon your privacy, Mr. Dumphy," he said, with a stately wave of his white hand, "if, as I surmise, from your disinclination, sir, to call it by no other name, to exchange the ordinary convivial courtesies common between gentlemen, sir,—you are disposed to resent any reminiscences of mine as reflecting upon the character of the young lady, sir, whom I had the pleasure to see in your company—if such be the case, sir, Ged!—I am ready to retire now, sir, and to give you to-morrow, or at any time, the satisfaction which no gentleman ever refuses another, and which Culpepper Starbottle has never been known to deny. My card, sir, you have already; my address, sir, is St. Charles Hotel, where

I and my friend, Mr. Dumphy, will be ready to receive you."

"Look here," said Mr. Dumphy, in surly but sincere alarm, "I don't drink because I've been drinking. No offence, Mr. Starbottle. I was only waiting for you to open what you had on your mind in the way of business, to order up a bottle of *Cliquot* to enable us to better digest it. Take your seat, Colonel. Bring champagne and two glasses." He rose, and under pretence of going to the sideboard, added in a lower tone to the servant who entered, "Stay within call, and in about ten minutes bring me some important message from the Bank—you hear? A glass of wine with you, Colonel. Happy to make your acquaintance! Here we go!"

The Colonel uttered a slight cough as if to clear away his momentary severity, bowed with gracious dignity, touched the glass of his host, drew out his handkerchief, wiped his mouth, and seated himself once more.

"If my object," he began, with a wave of dignified depreciation, "were simply one of ordinary business, I should have sought you,

sir, in the busy mart, and not among your Lares and Penates, nor in the blazing lights of the festive hall. I should have sought you at that temple which report and common rumour says that you, sir, as one of the favoured sons of Fortune, have erected to her worship. In my intercourse with the gifted John C. Calhoun I never sought him, sir, in the gladiatorial arena of the Senate, but rather with the social glass in the privacy of his own domicile. Ged, sir, in my profession, we recognise some quality in our relations even when professional with gentlemen that keep us from approaching them like a Yankee peddler with goods to sell!"

"What's your profession?" asked Mr. Dumphy.

"Until elected by the citizens of Siskiyou to represent them in the legislative councils I practised at the bar. Since then I have been open occasionally to retainers in difficult and delicate cases. In the various intrigues that arise in politics, in the more complicated relations of the two sexes—in, I may say, the two great passions of man-

kind, Ambition and Love, my services have, I believe, been considered of value. It has been my office, sir, to help the steed of vaulting ambition—er—er—over the fence, and to dry the—er—tearful yet glowing cheek of Beauty. But for the necessity of honour and secrecy in my profession, sir, I could give you the names of some of the most elegant women, and some of the first—the very first men in the land as the clients of Culpepper Starbottle."

"Very sorry," began Mr. Dumphy, "but if you're expecting to put me among your list of clients, I——"

Without taking the least notice of Dumphy's half-returned sneer, Colonel Starbottle interrupted him coolly: "Ged, sir!—it's out of the question, I'm retained on the other side."

The sneer instantly faded from Dumphy's face, and a look of genuine surprise took its place.

"What do you mean?" he said, curtly.

Colonel Starbottle drew his chair beside Dumphy, and leaning familiarly over his desk took Mr. Dumphy's own penholder and

persuasively emphasized the points of his speech upon Mr. Dumphy's arm with the blunt end. "Sir, when I say retained by the other side, it doesn't keep me from doing the honourable thing with the defendant—from recognising a gentleman and trying to settle this matter as between gentlemen."

"But what's all this about? Who is your plaintiff?" roared Dumphy, forgetting himself in his rage.

"Ged, sir—it's a woman — of course. Don't think I'm accusing you of any political ambition. Ha! ha! No, sir. You're like me! it's a woman—lovely woman—I saw it at a glance! Gentlemen like you and me, don't go through to fifty years without giving some thought to these dear little creatures. Sir, I despise a man who did. It's the weakness of a great man, sir."

Mr. Dumphy pushed his chair back with the grim deliberation of a man who had at last measured the strength of his adversary and was satisfied to risk an encounter.

"Look here, Colonel Starbottle, I don't know or care who your plaintiff is. I don't

know or care how she may have been deceived or wronged or disappointed or bamboozled, or what is the particular game that's up now. But you're a man of the world, you say, and as a man of the world and a man of sense, you know that no one in my position ever puts himself in any woman's power. I can't afford it! I don't pretend to be better than other men, but I ain't a fool. That's the difference between me and your clients!"

"Yes—but, my boy, that *is* the difference! Don't you see? In other cases the woman's a beautiful woman, a charming creature, you know. Ged, sometimes she's as proper and pious as a nun, but then the relations, you see, ain't legal! But hang it all, my boy, this is—YOUR WIFE!"

Mr. Dumphy with colourless cheeks, tried to laugh a reckless scornful laugh. "My wife is dead!"

"A mistake—Ged, sir!—a most miserable mistake. Understand me. I don't say that she hadn't ought to be! Ged, sir, from the look that that little blue eyed hussy gave you an hour ago—there ain't

much use of another woman around, but the fact is that she *is* living. You thought she was dead, and left her up there in the snow. She goes so far as to say—you know how these woman talk, Dumphy, Ged, sir, they'll say anything when they get down on a man—she says it ain't your fault if she wasn't dead! Eh? Sho?"

"A message, sir, business of the Bank, very important," said Dumphy's servant, opening the door.

"Get out!" said Dumphy, with an oath.

"But, sir, they told me, sir——"

"Get out! will you!" roared Dumphy.

The door closed on his astonished face. "It's all a—a—mistake," said Dumphy, when he had gone. "They died of starvation—all of them—while I was away hunting help. I've read the accounts."

Colonel Starbottle slowly drew from some vast moral elevation in his breast pocket a well-worn paper. It proved when opened to be a faded, blackened, and bethumbed document in Spanish. "Here is the report of the Commander of the Presidio who sent out the expedition. You read Spanish?

Well. The bodies of all the other women were identified except your wife's. Hang it, my boy, don't you see why she was excepted ? She wasn't there."

The Colonel darted a fat forefinger at his host and then drew back, and settled his purpled chin and wattled cheeks conclusively in his enormous shirt collar. Mr. Dumphy sank back in his chair at the contact as if the finger of Fate had touched him.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. CONROY HAS AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

THE hot weather had not been confined to San Francisco. San Pablo Bay had glittered, and the yellow currents of the San Joaquin and Sacramento glowed sullenly with a dull sluggish lava-like flow. No breeze stirred the wild oats that drooped on the western slope of the Contra Costa hills; the smoke of burning woods on the eastern hillsides rose silently and steadily; the great wheat fields of the intermediate valleys clothed themselves humbly in dust and ashes. A column of red dust accompanied the Wingdam and One Horse Gulch stage-coach, a pillar of fire by day as well as by night, and made the fainting passengers look longingly toward the snow-patched Sierras beyond. It was hot in California; few had ever seen the

like, and those who had were looked upon as enemies of their race. A rashly scientific man of Murphy's Camp who had a theory of his own, and upon that had prophesied a continuance of the probable recurrence of the earthquake shock, concluded he had better leave the settlement until the principles of meteorology were better recognised and established.

It was hot in One Horse Gulch—in the oven-like Gulch, on the burning sands and scorching bars of the river. It was hot even on Conroy's Hill, among the calm shadows of the dark-green pines—on the deep verandahs of the Conroy *cottage orné*. Perhaps this was the reason why Mrs. Gabriel Conroy, early that morning after the departure of her husband for the mill, had evaded the varnished and white-leaded heats of her own house and sought the more fragrant odours of the sedate pines beyond the hill-top. I fear, however, that something was due to a mysterious note which had reached her clandestinely the evening before, and which, seated on the trunk of a prostrate pine, she was now reperusing.

I should like to sketch her as she sat there. A broad-brimmed straw hat covered her head, that although squared a little too much at the temples for shapeliness was still made comely by the good taste with which —aided by a crimping-iron—she had treated her fine-spun electrical blonde hair. The heat had brought out a delicate dewy colour in her usually pale face, and had heightened the intense nervous brightness of her vivid grey eyes. From the same cause, probably, her lips were slightly parted, so that the rigidity that usually characterized their finely chiselled outlines was lost. She looked healthier; the long flowing skirts which she affected, after the fashion of most *petite* women, were gathered at a waist scarcely as sylph-like and unsubstantial as that which Gabriel first clasped after the accident in the fateful cañon. She seemed a trifle more languid—more careful of her personal comfort, and spent some time in adjusting herself to the inequalities of her uncouth seat with a certain pouting peevishness of manner that was quite as new to her character as it was certainly feminine and

charming. She held the open note in her thin, narrow, white-tipped fingers, and glanced over it again with a slight smile. It read as follows :—

"At ten o'clock I shall wait for you at the hill near the Big Pine! You shall give me an interview if you know yourself well. I say beware! I am strong, for I am injured! —VICTOR."

Mrs. Conroy folded the note again, still smiling, and placed it carefully in her pocket. Then she sat patient, her hands clasped lightly between her knees, the parasol open at her feet—the very picture of a fond, confiding tryst. Then she suddenly drew her feet under her, sideways, with a quick, nervous motion and examined the ground carefully with sincere distrust of all artful lurking vermin who lie in wait for helpless womanhood. Then she looked at her watch.

It was five minutes past the hour. There was no sound in the dim, slumbrous wood, but the far-off sleepy caw of a rook. A squirrel ran impulsively halfway down the bark of the nearest pine and, catching sight

of her tilted parasol, suddenly flattened himself against the bark, with outstretched limbs, a picture of abject terror. A bounding hare came upon it suddenly and had a palpitation of the heart that he thought he really never should get over. And then there was a slow crackling in the underbrush as of a masculine tread, and Mrs. Conroy, picking up her terrible parasol, shaded the cold fires of her grey eyes with it and sat calm and expectant.

A figure came slowly and listlessly up the hill. When within a dozen yards of her, she saw it was *not* Victor. But when it approached nearer she suddenly started to her feet with pallid cheeks and an exclamation upon her lips. It was the Spanish translator of Pacific Street. She would have flown, but on the instant he turned and recognised her with a cry, a start, and a passion equal to her own. For a moment they stood glaring at each other breathless but silent!

"Devarges!" said Mrs. Conroy, in a voice that was scarcely audible. "Good God!"

The stranger uttered a bitter laugh.

"Yes! Devarges!—the man who ran away with you—Devarges the traitor! Devarges the betrayer of your husband. Look at me! You know me—Henry Devarges! Your husband's brother!—your old accomplice—your lover—your dupe!"

"Hush," she said, imploringly glancing around through the dim woods, "for God's sake, hush!"

"And who are you," he went on, without heeding her, "which of the Mesdames Devarges is it now? Or have you taken the name of the young sprig of an officer for whom you deserted me and maybe in turn married? Or did he refuse you even that excuse for your perfidy? Or is it the wife and accomplice of this feeble-minded Conroy? What name shall I call you? Tell me quick! Oh, I have much to say, but I wish to be polite, madame; tell me to whom I am to speak!"

Despite the evident reality of his passion and fury there was something so unreal and grotesque in his appearance—in his antique foppery, in his dyed hair, in his false teeth, in his padded coat, in his thin strapped legs,

that this relentless woman cowered before him in very shame, not of her crime but of her accomplice! "Hush," she said, "call me your friend; I am always your friend, Henry! Call me anything, but let me go from here. For God's sake, do you hear? Not so loud! Another time and another place I will listen," and she drew slowly back, until, scarce knowing what he did, she had led him away from the place of rendezvous toward the ruined cabin. Here she felt she was at least safe from the interruption of Victor. "How came you here? How did you find what had become of me? Where have you been these long years?" she asked, hastily.

Within the last few moments she had regained partially the strange power that she had always exerted over all men except Gabriel Conroy. The stranger hesitated, and then answered in a voice that had more of hopelessness than bitterness in its quality, "I came here six years ago, a broken, ruined, and disgraced man. I had no ambition but to hide myself from all who had known me, from that brother whose

wife I had stolen, and whose home I had broken up—from you—you, Julie! you and your last lover—from the recollection of your double treachery!" He had raised his voice here, but was checked by the unflinching eye and cautionary gesture of the woman before him. "When you abandoned me in St. Louis, I had no choice but death or a second exile. I could not return to Switzerland, I could not live in the sickening shadow of my crime and its bitter punishment. I came here. My education, my knowledge of the language stood me in good stead. I might have been a rich man, I might have been an influential one, but I only used my opportunities for the bare necessaries of life and the means to forget my trouble in dissipation. I became a drudge by day, a gambler by night. I was always a gentleman. Men thought me crazy, an enthusiast, but they learned to respect me. Traitor as I was in a larger trust, no one doubted my honour or dared to question my integrity. But bah! what is this to you? You!"

He would have turned from her again in

very bitterness, but in the act he caught her eye, and saw in it, if not sympathy, at least a certain critical admiration, that again brought him to her feet. For despicable as this woman was, she was pleased at this pride in the man she had betrayed, was gratified at the sentiment that lifted him above his dyed hair and his pitiable foppery, and felt a certain honourable satisfaction in the fact that, even after the lapse of years, he had proved true to her own intuitions of him.

"I had been growing out of my despair, Julie," he went on, sadly; "I was, or believed I was, forgetting my fault, forgetting even *you*, when there came to me the news of my brother's death—by starvation. Listen to me, Julie. One day there came to me for translation a document, revealing the dreadful death of him—your husband, my brother—do you hear?—by starvation! Driven from his home by shame, he had desperately sought to hide himself as I had—accepted the hardship of emigration—he, a gentleman and a man of letters—with the boors and rabble of the

plains, had shared their low trials and their vulgar pains, and died among them, unknown and unrecorded."

"He died as he had lived," said Mrs. Conroy, passionately, "a traitor and a hypocrite; he died following the fortunes of his paramour, an uneducated, vulgar rustic, to whom, dying, he willed a fortune —this girl—Grace Conroy. Thank God, I have the record! Hush! what's that?"

Whatever it was—a falling bough or the passing of some small animal in the underbush—it was past now. A dead silence enwrapped the two solitary actors; they might have been the first man and the first woman, so encompassed were they by Nature and solitude.

"No," she went on, hurriedly, in a lower tone, "it was the same old story—the story of that girl at Basle—the story of deceit and treachery which brought us first together, which made you, Henry, my friend, which turned our sympathies into a more dangerous passion. You have suffered. Ah, well, so have I. We are equal now."

Henry Devarges looked speechlessly upon

his companion. Her voice trembled, there were tears in her eyes, that had replaced the burning light of womanly indignation. He had come there knowing her to have been doubly treacherous to her husband and himself. She had not denied it. He had come there to tax her with an infamous imposture, but had found himself within the last minute glowing with sympathetic condemnation of his own brother, and ready to accept the yet unoffered and perfectly explicable theory of that imposture. More than that, he began to feel that his own wrongs were slight in comparison with the injuries received by this superior woman. The woman who endeavours to justify herself to her jealous lover, always has a powerful ally in his own self-love, and Devarges was quite willing to believe that even if he had lost her love, he had never at least been deceived. And the answer to the morality of this imposture was before him. Here was she married to the surviving brother of the girl she had personated. Had he—had Dr. Devarges ever exhibited as noble trust, as perfect appreciation of her

nature and sufferings? Had they not thrown away the priceless pearl of this woman's love through ignorance and selfishness? You and I, my dear sir, who are not in love with this most reprehensible creature, will be quick to see the imperfect logic of Henry Devarges, but when a man constitutes himself accuser, judge, and jury of the woman he loves, he is very apt to believe he is giving a verdict when he is only entering a *nolle prosequi*. It is probable that Mrs. Conroy had noticed this weakness in her companion, even with her preoccupied fears of the inopportune appearance of Victor, whom she felt she could have accounted for much better in his absence. Victor was an impulsive person, and there are times when this quality, generally adored by a self-restrained sex, is apt to be confounding.

"Why did you come here to see me?" asked Mrs. Conroy, with a dangerous smile. "Only to abuse me?"

"There is another grant in existence for the same land that you claim as Grace Conroy or Mrs. Conroy," returned Devarges, with masculine bluntness, "a grant given

prior to that made to my brother Paul. A suspicion that some imposture has been practised is entertained by the party holding the grant, and I have been requested to get at the facts."

Mrs. Conroy's grey eyes lightened. "And how were these suspicions aroused?"

"By an anonymous letter."

"And you have seen it?"

"Yes; both it and the handwriting in portions of the grant are identical."

"And you know the hand?"

"I do; it is that of a man now here, an old Californian—Victor Ramirez!"

He fixed his eyes upon her; unabashed she turned her own clear glance on his, and asked, with a dazzling smile, "But does not your client know that, whether this grant is a forgery or not, my husband's title is good?"

"Yes; but the sympathies of my client, as you call *her*, are interested in the orphan girl Grace."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Conroy, with the faintest possible sigh, "your client, for whom you

have travelled—how many miles?—is a woman."

Half-pleased, but half-embarrassed, Devarges said, "Yes."

"I understand," said Mrs. Conroy, slowly. "A young woman, perhaps a good, a *pretty* one! And you have said, 'I will prove this Mrs. Conroy an impostor,' and you are here. Well, I do not blame you. You are a man. It is well perhaps it is so."

"But, Julie, hear me!" interrupted the alarmed Devarges.

"No more!" said Mrs. Conroy, rising, and waving her thin white hand, "I do not blame you. I could expect—I deserve—no more! Go back to your client, sir, tell her that you have seen Julie Devarges, the impostor. Tell her to go and press her claim, and that you will assist her. Finish the work that the anonymous letter-writer has begun, and earn your absolution for your crime and my folly. Get your reward—you deserve it—but tell her to thank God for having raised up to her better friends than Julie Devarges ever possessed in the heyday of her beauty. Go! Farewell! No; let

me go, Henry Devarges, I am going to my husband. He at least has known how to forgive and protect a friendless and erring woman."

Before the astonished man could recover his senses, elusive as a sunbeam, she had slipped through his fingers and was gone. For a moment only he followed the flash of her white skirt through the dark aisles of the forest, and then the pillared trees, crowding in upon each other, hid her from view.

Perhaps it was well, for a moment later Victor Ramirez, flushed, wild-eyed, dishevelled, and panting, stumbled blindly upon the trail, and blundered into Devarges' presence. The two men eyed each other in silence.

"A hot day for a walk," said Devarges, with an ill-concealed sneer.

"Vengeance of God! you are right, it is," returned Victor. "And you?"

"Oh, I have been fighting flies. Good day!"

CHAPTER VI.

GABRIEL DISCARDS HIS HOME AND WEALTH.

I AM sorry to say that Mrs. Conroy's expression as she fled was not entirely consistent with the grieved and heartbroken manner with which she had just closed the interview with Henry Devarges. Something of a smile lurked about the corners of her thin lips as she tripped up the steps of her house, and stood panting a little with the exertion in the shadow of the porch. But here she suddenly found herself becoming quite faint, and entering the apparently empty house, passed at once to her boudoir, and threw herself exhaustedly on the lounge with a certain peevish discontent at her physical weakness. No one had seen her enter; the Chinese servants were congregated in the distant wash-house. Her housekeeper had taken advantage of her

absence to ride to the town. The unusual heat was felt to be an apology for any domestic negligence.

She was very thoughtful. The shock she had felt on first meeting Devarges was past; she was satisfied she still retained an influence over him sufficient to keep him her ally against Ramirez, whom she felt she now had reason to fear. Hitherto his jealousy had only shown itself in vapouring and bravado; she had been willing to believe him capable of offering her physical violence in his insane fury, and had not feared it, but this deliberately planned treachery made her tremble. She would see Devarges again; she would recite the wrongs she had received from the dead brother and husband, and in Henry's weak attempt to still his own conscience with that excuse, she could trust to him to keep Ramirez in check, and withhold the exposure until she and Gabriel could get away. Once out of the country she could laugh at them both; once away, she could devote herself to win the love of Gabriel, without which she had begun to feel her life and schemes had been in vain.

She would hurry their departure at once. Since the report had spread affecting the value of the mine, Gabriel, believing it true, had vaguely felt it his duty to stand by his doubtful claim and accept its fortunes, and had delayed his preparations. She would make him believe that it was Dumphy's wish that he should go at once; she would make Dumphy write him to that effect. She smiled as she thought of the power she had lately achieved over the fears of this financial magnate. She would do all this but for her physical weakness. She ground her teeth as she thought of it: that at such a time she should be—and yet a moment later a sudden fancy flashed across her mind, and she closed her eyes that she might take in its delusive sweetness more completely. It might be that it wanted only this to touch his heart—some men were so strange—and if it were, oh, God!—she stopped.

What was that noise? The house had been very quiet, so still that she had heard a woodpecker tapping on its roof. But now she heard distinctly the slow, heavy tread of a man in one of the upper chambers,

which had been used as a lumber-room. Mrs. Conroy had none of the nervous apprehension of her sex in regard to probable ghosts or burglars—she had too much of a man's practical preoccupation for that, yet she listened curiously. It came again. There was no mistaking it now. It was the tread of the man with whom her thoughts had been busy—her husband.

What was he doing here? In the few months of their married life he had never been home before at this hour. The lumber-room contained among other things the *disjecta membra* of his old mining life and experience. He may have wanted something. There was an old bag which she remembered he said contained some of his mother's dresses. Yet it was so odd that he should go there now. Any other time but this. A terrible superstitious dread—a dread that any other time she would have laughed to scorn, began to creep over her. Hark! he was moving. She stopped breathing.

The tread recommenced. It passed into the upper hall, and came slowly down the stairs, each step recording itself in her

heart-beats. It reached the lower hall and seemed to hesitate; then it came slowly along toward her door, and again hesitated. Another moment of suspense, and she felt she would have screamed. And then the door slowly opened, and Gabriel stood before her.

In one swift, intuitive, hopeless look she read her fate. He knew all! And yet his eyes, except that they bore less of the usual perplexity and embarrassment with which they had habitually met hers, though grave and sad, had neither indignation nor anger. He had changed his clothes to a rough miner's blouse and trousers, and carried in one hand a miner's pack, and in the other a pick and shovel. He laid them down slowly and deliberately, and seeing her eyes fixed upon them with a nervous intensity, began apologetically—

"They contains, Ma'am, on'y a blanket and a few duds ez I allus used to carry with me. I'll open it ef you say so. But you know me, Ma'am, well enough to allow that I'd take nothin' outer this yer house ez I didn't bring inter it."

"You are going away," she said, in a voice that was not audible to herself, but seemed to vaguely echo in her mental consciousness.

"I be. Ef ye don't know why, Ma'am, I reckon ez you'll hear it from the same vyce ez I did. It's on'y the squar thing to say afore I go, ez it ain't my fault nor hiz'n. I was on the hill this mornin' in the ole cabin."

It seemed as if he had told her this before, so old and self-evident the fact appeared.

"I was sayin' I woz on the hill, when I heerd vyces, and lookin' out I seed you with a stranger. From wot ye know o' me and my ways, Ma'am, it ain't like me to listen to thet wot ain't allowed for me to hear. And ye might hev stood thar ontel now ef I hedn't seed a chap dodgin' round behind the trees spyin' and list'nin'. When I seed thet man I knowed him to be a pore Mexican, whose legs I'd tended yer in the Gulch mor'n a year ago. I went up to him, and when he seed me he'd hev run. But I laid my hand onto him—and—he stayed!"

There was something so unconsciously

large and fine in the slight gesture of this giant's hand as he emphasized his speech, that even through her swiftly rising pride Mrs. Conroy was awed and thrilled by it. But the next moment she found herself saying—whether aloud or not she could not tell—"If he had loved me, he would have killed him then and there."

"Wot thet man sed to me—bein' flustered and savage-like, along o' bein' choked hard to keep him from singin' out and breakin' in upon you and thet entire stranger—ain't fur me to say. Knowin' him longer then I do, I reckon you suspect 'bout wot it was. That it ez the truth I read it in your face now, Ma'am, ez I reckon I might hev read it off and on in many ways and vari's styles sens we've been yer together, on'y I waz thet weak and ondecided yer."

He raised his hand to his forehead here, and with his broad palm appeared to wipe away the trouble and perplexity that had overshadowed it. He then drew a paper from his breast.

"I've draw'd up a little paper yer ez I'll

hand over to Lawyer Maxwell makin' over back agin all ez I once hed o' you and all ez I ever expect to hev. For I don't agree with thet Mexican thet wot was gin' to Grace belongs to me. I allow ez she kin settle thet herself, ef she ever comes, and ef I know thet chile, Ma'am, she ain't goin' tech it with a two-foot pole. We've allus bin simple folks, Ma'am—though it ain't the squar thing to take me fur a sample—and oneddieated and common, but thar ain't a Conroy ez lived ez was ever pinted for money, or ez ever took more outer the kompany's wages then his grub and his clothes."

It was the first time that he had ever asserted himself in her presence, and even then he did it half apologetically yet with an unconscious dignity in his manner that became him well. He reached down as he spoke and took up his pick and his bundle, and turned to go.

"There is nothing then that you are leaving behind you?" she asked.

He raised his eyes squarely to hers.

"No," he said, simply, "nothing."

Oh, if she could have only spoken! Oh, had she but dared to tell him that he had left behind that which he could not take away, that which the mere instincts of his manhood would have stirred him to tenderness and mercy, that which would have appealed to him through its very helplessness and youth. But she dared not. That eloquence which an hour before had been ready enough to sway the feelings of the man to whom she had been faithless and did not love, failed her now. In the grasp of her first and only hopeless passion this arch-hypocrite had lost even the tact of the simplest of her sex. She did not even assume an indifference! She said nothing; when she raised her eyes again he was gone.

She was wrong. At the front door he stopped, hesitated a moment, and then returned slowly and diffidently to the room. Her heart beat rapidly, and then was still.

"Ye asked me jest now," he said, falteringly, "ef thar was anything ez I was leavin' behind. Thar is—ef ye'll overlook my sayin' it. When you and me

allowed to leave fur furrin parts, I reckoned to leave thet housekeeper behind, and unbeknowed to ye I gin her some money and a charge. I tole her thet if ever thet dear chile—Sister Grace—came here, thet she should take her in and do by her ez I would, and let me know. Et may be a heap to ask, but ef it 'tain't too much—I—shouldn't—like—yer—to turn—thet innocent unsuspectin' chile away from the house thet she might take to be mine. Ye needn't let on anythin' thet's gone—ye needn't tell her wot a fool I've been, but jest take her in and send for me. Lawyer Maxwell will gin ye my address."

The sting recalled her benumbed life. She rose with a harsh dissonant laugh and said, "Your wishes shall be fulfilled—if—" she hesitated a moment—"*I* am here."

But he did not hear the last sentence, and was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT PASSED UNDER THE PINE AND WHAT REMAINED THERE.

RAMIREZ was not as happy in his revenge as he had anticipated. He had, in an instant of impulsive rage, fired his mine prematurely, and, as he feared, impotently. Gabriel had not visibly sickened, faded, nor fallen blighted under the exposure of his wife's deceit. It was even doubtful, as far as Ramirez could judge from his quiet reception of the revelation, whether he would even call that wife to account for it. Again, Ramirez was unpleasantly conscious that this exposure had lost some of its dignity and importance by being wrested from him as a *confession* made under pressure or duress. Worse than all, he had lost the opportunity of previously

threatening Mrs. Conroy with the disclosure, and the delicious spectacle of her discomfiture. In point of fact his revenge had been limited to the cautious cowardice of the anonymous letter-writer, who, stabbing in the dark, enjoys neither the contemplation of the agonies of his victim, nor the assertion of his own individual power.

To this torturing reflection a terrible suspicion of the Spanish translator, Perkins, was superadded. For Gabriel, Ramirez had only that contempt which every lawless lover has for the lawful husband of his mistress, while for Perkins he had that agonizing doubt which every lawless lover has for every other man but the husband. In making this exposure had he not precipitated a catastrophe as fatal to himself as to the husband? Might they not both drive this woman into the arms of another man? Ramirez paced the little bedroom of the Grand Conroy Hotel, a prey to that bastard remorse of all natures like his own, —the overwhelming consciousness of opportunities for villany misspent.

Come what might he would see her again,

and at once. He would let her know that he suspected her relations with this translator. He would tell her that he had written the letter—that he had forged the grant—that——

A tap at the door recalled him to himself. It opened presently to Sal, coy, bashful, and conscious. The evident agitation of this young foreigner had to Sal's matter-of-fact comprehension only one origin—a hopeless, consuming passion for herself.

"Dinner hez bin done gone an hour ago," said that arch virgin, "but I put suthin' by for ye. Ye was inquirin' last night about them Conroys. I thought I'd tell ye thet Gabril hez bin yer askin' arter Lawyer Maxwell—which he's off to Sacramento—altho' one o' Sue Markle's most intymit friends and steddeyist boarders!"

But Mr. Ramirez had no ear for Gabriel now.

"Tell to me, Mees Clark," he said, suddenly turning all his teeth on her, with gasping civility, "where is this Señor Perkins, eh?"

"Thet shiny chap—ez looks like a old

turned alpacker gownd!" said Sal; "thet man ez I can't abear," she continued, with a delicate maidenly suggestion that Ramirez need fear no rivalry from that quarter. "I don't mind—and don't keer to know. He hezn't bin yer since mornin'. I reckon he's up somewhar on Conroy's Hill. All I know ez thet he sent a message yer to git ready his volise to put aboard the Wingdam stage to-night. Are ye goin' with him?"

"No," said Ramirez, curtly.

"Axin' yer parding for the question, but seein' ez he'd got booked for two places, I tho't ez maybe ye'd got tired o' plain mounting folks and mounting ways, and waz goin' with him," and Sal threw an arch yet reproachful glance at Ramirez.

"Booked for two seats," gasped Victor, "ah! for a lady, perhaps—eh, Mees Clark? for a lady?"

Sal bridled instantly at what might have seemed a suggestion of impropriety on her part. "A lady—like his imperance—indeed! I'd like to know who'd demean theirselves by goin' with the like o' he! But you're not startin' out agin without

your dinner, and it waitin' ye in the oven? No? La! Mr. Ramirez, ye must be in luv! I've heerd tell ez it do take away the appetite; not knowin' o' my own experense, though it's little hez passed my lips these two days, and only when tempted."

But before Sal could complete her diagnosis, Mr. Ramirez gasped a few words of hasty excuse, seized his hat, and hurried from the room.

Leaving Sal a second time to mourn over the effect of her coquettish playfulness upon the sensitive Italian nature, Victor Ramirez, toiling through the heat and fiery dust shaken from the wheels of incoming teams, once more brushed his way up the long ascent of Conroy's Hill, and did not stop until he reached its summit. Here he paused to collect his scattered thoughts, to decide upon some plan of action, to control the pulse of his beating temples, quickened by excitement and the fatigue of the ascent, and to wipe the perspiration from his streaming face. He must see her at once; but how and where? To go boldly to her house would be to meet her in the presence

of Gabriel, and that was no longer an object; besides, if she were with this stranger it would not probably be there. By haunting this nearest umbrage to the house he would probably intercept them on their way to the Gulch, or overhear any other conference. By lingering here he would avoid any interference from Gabriel's cabin on the right, and yet be able to detect the approach of any one from the road. The spot that he had chosen was, singularly enough, in earlier days, Gabriel's favourite haunt for the indulgence of his noontide contemplation and pipe. A great pine, the largest of its fellows, towered in a little opening to the right, as if it had drawn apart for seclusion, and, obeying some mysterious attraction, Victor went toward it and seated himself on an abutting root at its base. Here a singular circumstance occurred, which at first filled him with superstitious fear. The handkerchief with which he had wiped his face—nay, his very shirt-front itself—suddenly appeared as if covered with blood. A moment later he saw that the ensanguined hue was only due to the dust through which

he had plunged, blending with the perspiration, that on the least exertion still started from every pore of his burning skin.

The sun was slowly sinking. The long shadow of Reservoir Ridge fell upon Conroy's Hill, and seemed to cut down the tall pine that a moment before had risen redly in the sunlight. The sounds of human labour slowly died out of the Gulch below, the far-off whistle of teamsters in the Wingdam road began to fail. One by one the red openings on the wooded hillside opposite went out, as if Nature were putting up the shutters for the day. With the gathering twilight Ramirez became more intensely alert and watchful. Treading stealthily around the lone pine tree, with shining eyes and gleaming teeth, he might have been mistaken for some hesitating animal waiting for that boldness which should come with the coming night. Suddenly he stopped, and leaning forward peered into the increasing shadow. Coming up the trail from the town was a woman. Even at that distance and by that uncertain light, Ramirez recognised the flapping hat and

ungainly stride. It was Sal—perdition! Might the devil fly away with her! But she turned to the right with the trail that wound toward Gabriel's hut and the cottage beyond, and Victor breathed, or rather panted, more freely. And then a voice at his very side thrilled him to his smallest fibre, and he turned quickly. It was Mrs. Conroy, white, erect, and truculent.

"What are you doing here?" she said, with a sharp, quick utterance.

"Hush!" said Ramirez, trembling with the passion called up by the figure before him. "Hush! There is one who has just come up the trail."

"What do I care who hears me now? You have made caution unnecessary," she responded, sharply. "All the world knows us now! and so I ask you again, what are *you* doing here?"

He would have approached her nearer, but she drew back, twitching her long white skirt behind her with a single quick feminine motion of her hand, as if to save it from contamination.

Victor laughed uneasily. "You have

come to keep your appointment; it is not my fault if I am late."

"I have come here because, for the last half-hour I have watched you from my verandah, coursing in and out among the trees like a hound as you are! I have come to whip you off my land as I would a hound. But I have first a word or two to say to you as the man you have assumed to be."

Standing there with the sunset glow over her erect, graceful figure, in the pink flush of her cheek, in the cold fires of her eyes, in all the thousand nameless magnetisms of her presence, there was so much of her old power over this slave of passion, that the scorn of her words touched him only to inflame him, and he would have grovelled at her feet could he have touched the thin three fingers that she warningly waved at him.

"You wrong me, Julie, by the God of Heaven! I was wild, mad, this morning—you understand—for when I came to you I found you with another! I had reason, Mother of God, I had reason for my mad-

ness, reason enough, but I came in peace, Julie, I came in peace!"

"In peace," returned Mrs. Conroy, scornfully, "your note was a peaceful one, indeed!"

"Ah! but I knew not how else to make you hear me. I had news—news you understand, news that might save you, for I came from the woman who holds the grant. Ah! you will listen, will you not? For one moment only, Julie, hear me and I am gone!"

Mrs. Conroy with abstracted gaze leaned against the tree. "Go on," she said, coldly.

"Ah! you will listen then!" said Victor, joyfully, "and when you have listened you shall understand! Well. First I have the fact that the lawyer for this woman is the man who deserted the Grace Conroy in the mountains, the man who was called Philip Ashley, but whose real name is Poinsett."

"Who did you say?" said Mrs. Conroy, suddenly stepping from the tree, and fixing a pair of cruel eyes on Ramirez.

"Arthur Poinsett—an ex-soldier, an

officer. Ah, you do not believe—I swear to God it is so!"

"What has this to do with me?" she said, scornfully, resuming her position beside the pine. "Go on—or is this all?"

"No, but it is much. Look you! he is the affianced of a rich widow in the Southern Country, you understand? No one knows his past. Ah, you begin to comprehend. He does not dare to seek out the real Grace Conroy. He shall not dare to press the claim of his client. Consequently, he does nothing!"

"Is this all your news?"

"All!—ah, no. There is one more, but I dare not speak it here," he said, glancing craftily around through the slowly darkening wood.

"Then it must remain untold," returned Mrs. Conroy, coldly, "for this is our last and only interview."

"But, Julie!"

"Have you done?" she continued, in the same tone.

Whether her indifference was assumed or not, it was effective. Ramirez glanced again

quickly around, and then said, sulkily, "Come nearer and I will tell you. Ah, you doubt—you doubt? Be it so." But seeing that she did not move he drew toward the tree and whispered—"Bend here your head—I will whisper it."

Mrs. Conroy, evading his outstretched hand, bent her head. He whispered a few words in her ear that were inaudible a foot from the tree.

"Did you tell this to him—to Gabriel?" she asked, fixing her eyes upon him, yet without change in her frigid demeanour.

"No!—I swear to you, Julie, no! I would not have told him anything, but I was wild, crazy. And he was a brute, a great bear. He held me fast, here, so! I could not move. It was a forced confession. Yes—Mother of God—by force!"

Luckily for Victor the darkness hid the scorn that momentarily flashed in the woman's eyes at this corroboration of her husband's strength, and the weakness of the man before her. "And is this all that you have to tell me?" she only said.

"All—I swear to you, Julie—all."

"Then listen, Victor Ramirez," she said, swiftly stepping from the tree into the path before him, and facing him with a white and rigid face. "Whatever was your purpose in coming here, it has been successful! You have done all that you intended, and more! The man whose mind you came to poison—the man you wished to turn against me—has gone!—has left me—left me never to return!—he never loved me! Your exposure of me was to him a godsend, for it gave him an excuse for the insults he has heaped upon me, for the treachery he has always hidden in his bosom!"

Even in the darkness she could see the self-complacent flash of Victor's teeth, could hear the quick, hurried sound of his breath as he bent his head toward her, and knew that he was eagerly reaching out his hand for hers. He would have caught her gesturing hand and covered it with kisses but that, divining his intention, without flinching from her position she whipped both her hands behind her.

"Well—you are satisfied! You have had your say and your way. Now I shall have

mine. Do you suppose I came here to-night to congratulate you? No, I came here to tell you that insulted, outraged, and spurned as I have been by my husband, Gabriel Conroy—cast-off and degraded as I stand here to-night—*I love him!* Love him as I never loved any man before; love him as I never shall love any man again; love him as I hate you! Love him so that I shall follow him wherever he goes, if I have to drag myself after him on my knees. His hatred is more precious to me than your love. Do you hear me, Victor Ramirez? That is what *I* came here to tell you! More than that—listen! The secret you have whispered to me just now, whether true or false, I shall take to him. I will help him to find his sister. I will make him love me yet if I sacrifice you, everybody, my own life, to do it! Do you hear that, Victor Ramirez, you dog!—you Spanish mongrel! —you half-breed! Oh, grit your teeth there in the darkness—I know you—grit your teeth as you did to-day when Gabriel held you squirming under his thumb! It was a fine sight, Victor—worthy of the manly

Secretary who stole a dying girl's papers!—worthy of the valiant soldier who abandoned his garrison to a Yankee peddler and his mule. Oh, I know you, sir, and have known you from the first day I made you my tool—my dupe! Go on, sir, go on—draw your knife, do! I am not afraid, coward! I shall not scream, I promise you! Come on!"

With an insane, articulate gasp of rage and shame he sprang towards her with an uplifted knife. But at the same instant she saw a hand reach from the darkness and fall swiftly upon his shoulder, saw him turn and with an oath struggle furiously in the arms of Devarges, and, without waiting to thank her deliverer, or learn the result of his interference, darted by the struggling pair and fled.

Possessed only by a single idea she ran swiftly to her home. Here she pencilled a few hurried lines, and called one of her Chinese servants to her side.

"Take this, Ah Fe, and give it to Mr. Conroy. You will find him at Lawyer Maxwell's, or if not there he will tell you

where he has gone. But you must find him. If he has left town already you must follow him. Find him within an hour and I'll double that"—she placed a gold piece in his hand. "Go at once."

However limited might have been Ah Fe's knowledge of the English language, there was an eloquence in the woman's manner that needed no translation. He nodded his head intelligently, said, "Me shabbe you—muchee quick," caused the gold piece and the letter to instantly vanish up his sleeve, and started from the house in a brisk trot. Nor did he allow any incidental diversion to interfere with the business in hand. The noise of struggling in the underbrush on Conroy's Hill, and a cry for help only extracted from Ah Fe the response, "You muchee go-to-hellee—no foolee me!" as he trotted unconcernedly by. In half an hour he had reached Lawyer Maxwell's office. But the news was not favourable. Gabriel had left an hour before, they knew not where. Ah Fe hesitated a moment, and then ran quickly down the hill to where a gang of his fellow-countrymen were working in a

ditch at the roadside. Ah Fe paused, and uttered in a high recitative a series of the most extraordinary ejaculations, utterly unintelligible to the few Americans who chanced to be working near. But the effect was magical; in an instant pick and shovel were laid aside, and before the astonished miners could comprehend it the entire gang of Chinamen had dispersed, and in another instant were scattered over the several trails leading out of One Horse Gulch, except one.

That one was luckily taken by Ah Fe. In half an hour he came upon the object of his search, seated on a boulder by the wayside, smoking his evening pipe. His pick, shovel, and pack lay by his side. Ah Fe did not waste time in preliminary speech or introduction. He simply handed the missive to his master, and instantly turned his back upon him and departed. In another half-hour every Chinaman was back in the ditch, working silently as if nothing had happened.

Gabriel laid aside his pipe and held the letter a moment hesitatingly between his finger and thumb. Then opening it, he at

once recognised the small Italian hand with which his wife had kept his accounts and written from his dictation, and something like a faint feeling of regret overcame him as he gazed at it, without taking the meaning of the text. And then with the hesitation, repetition, and audible utterance of an illiterate person he slowly read the following :—

"I was wrong. You have left something behind you—a secret that as you value your happiness, you must take with you. If you come to Conroy's Hill within the next two hours you shall know it, for I shall not enter that house again, and leave here to-night for ever. I do not ask you to come for the sake of your wife, but for the sake of the woman she once personated. You will come because you love Grace, not because you care for

"JULIE."

There was but one fact that Gabriel clearly grasped in this letter. That was that it referred to some news of Grace. That was enough. He put away his pipe,

rose, shouldered his pack and pick, and deliberately retraced his steps. When he reached the town, with the shamefacedness of a man who had just taken leave of it for ever, he avoided the main thoroughfare, but did this so clumsily and incautiously, after his simple fashion, that two or three of the tunnel-men noticed him ascending the hill by an inconvenient and seldom used by-path. He did not stay long, however, for in a short time—some said ten, others said fifteen minutes—he was seen again, descending rapidly and recklessly, and crossing the Gulch disappeared in the bushes, at the base of Bald Mountain.

With the going down of the sun that night, the temperature fell also, and the fierce, dry, desert heat that had filled the land for the past few days fled away before a fierce wind which rose with the coldly rising moon, that during the rest of the night rode calmly over the twisting tops of writhing pines on Conroy's Hill, over the rattling windows of the town, and over the beaten dust of mountain roads. But even with the night the wind passed too, and the sun arose the next

morning upon a hushed and silent landscape. It touched, according to its habit, first the tall top of the giant pine on Conroy's Hill, and then slid softly down its shaft until it reached the ground. And there it found Victor Ramirez, with a knife thrust through his heart, lying dead!

BOOK VI.

A DIP.

CHAPTER I.

MR. HAMLIN'S RECREATION CONTINUED.

WHEN Doña Dolores after the departure of Mrs. Sepulvida missed the figure of Mr. Jack Hamlin from the plain before her window, she presumed he had followed that lady and would have been surprised to have known that he was at that moment within her castle, drinking *aguardiente* with no less a personage than the solemn Don Juan Salvatierra. In point of fact, with that easy audacity which distinguished him, Jack had penetrated the courtyard, gained the hospitality of Don Juan without even revealing his name and profession to that usually ceremonious gentleman, and after holding him in delicious fascination for two hours, had actually left him lamentably intoxicated, and utterly oblivious of the character of his guest. Why

Jack did not follow up his advantage by seeking an interview with the mysterious *Señora* who had touched him so deeply I cannot say, nor could he himself afterwards determine. A sudden bashfulness and timidity which he had never before experienced in his relations with the sex, tied his own tongue, while Don Juan with the garrulity which inebrity gave to his, poured forth the gossip of the Mission and the household. It is possible also that a certain vague hopelessness, equally novel to Jack, sent him away, in lower spirits than he came. It is not remarkable that Doña Dolores knew nothing of the visit of this guest, until three days afterwards, for during that time she was indisposed and did not leave her room, but it *was* remarkable that on learning it she flew into a paroxysm of indignation and rage that alarmed Don Juan and frightened her attendants.

"And why was *I* not told of the presence of this strange *Americano?* Am I a child, holy St. Anthony! that I am to be kept in ignorance of my duty as the hostess of the Blessed Trinity, or are you, Don Juan, my

dueña? A brave *caballero*, who, I surmise from your description, is the same that protected me from insult at Mass last Sunday, and he is not to 'kiss my hand?' Mother of God! And his name—you have forgotten?"

In vain Don Juan protested that the strange *caballero* had not requested an audience, and that a proper maidenly spirit would have prevented the Doña from appearing, unsought.

"Better that I should have been thought forward—and these *Americanos* are of a different habitude, my uncle—than that the Blessed Trinity should have been misrepresented by the guzzling of *aguardiente!*"

Howbeit, Mr. Hamlin had not found the climate of San Antonio conducive to that strict repose that his physician had recommended, and left it the next day with an accession of feverish energy that was new to him. He had idled away three days of excessive heat at Sacramento, and on the fourth, had flown to the mountains and found himself on the morning of the first cool day at Wingdam.

"Anybody here I know?" he demanded

of his faithful henchman, as Pete brought in his clothes, freshly brushed for the morning toilette.

"No, sah!"

"Nor want to, eh?" continued the cynical Jack, leisurely getting out of bed.

Pete reflected. "Dere is two o' dese yar Yeastern tourists—dem folks as is goin' round inspectin' de country—down in de parlour. Jess come over from de Big Trees. I recken dey's some o' de same party—dem Frisco chaps—Mass Dumphy and de odders haz been unloadin' to. Dey's mighty green, and de boys along de road has been fillin' 'em up. It's jess so much water on de dried apples dat Pete Dumphy's been shovin' into 'em."

Jack smiled grimly. "I reckon you needn't bring up my breakfast, Pete, I'll go down."

The party thus obscurely referred to by Pete, were Mr. and Mrs. Raynor, who had been "doing" the Big Trees, under the intelligent guidance of a San Francisco editor who had been deputized by Mr. Dumphy to represent Californian hospitality. They

were exceedingly surprised during breakfast by the entrance of a pale, handsome, languid gentleman, accurately dressed, whose infinite neatness shamed their own bedraggled appearance, and who, accompanied by his own servant, advanced and quietly took a seat opposite the tourists and their guide. Mrs. Raynor at once became conscious of some negligence in her toilette, and after a moment's embarrassment excused herself and withdrew. Mr. Raynor, impressed with the appearance of the stranger, telegraphed his curiosity by elbowing the editor, who, however, for some reason best known to himself, failed to respond. Possibly he recognised the presence of the notorious Mr. Jack Hamlin in the dark-eyed stranger, and may have had ample reasons for refraining from voicing the popular reputation of that gentleman before his face, or possibly he may have been inattentive. Howbeit, after Mr. Hamlin's entrance he pretermitted the hymn of California praise and became reticent and absorbed in his morning paper. Mr. Hamlin waited for the lady to retire, and then, calmly ignoring the presence of

any other individual, languidly drew from his pocket a revolver and bowie-knife, and placing them in an easy habitual manner on either side of his plate, glanced carelessly over the table, and then called Pete to his side.

"Tell them," said Jack, quietly, "that I want some *large* potatoes: ask them what they mean by putting those little things on the table. Tell them to be quick. Is your rifle loaded?"

"Yes, sah," said Pete, promptly, without relaxing a muscle of his serious ebony face.

"Well—take it along with you."

But here the curiosity of Mr. Raynor, who had been just commenting on the really enormous size of the potatoes, got the best of his prudence. Failing to make his companion respond to his repeated elbowings, he leaned over the table toward the languid stranger. "Excuse me, sir," he said, politely, "but did I understand you to say that you thought these potatoes *small*—that there are really larger ones to be had?"

"It's the first time," returned Jack,

gravely, "that I ever was insulted by having a *whole* potato brought to me. I didn't know it was possible before. Perhaps in this part of the country the vegetables are poor. I'm a stranger to this section. I take it you are too. But because I am a stranger I don't see why I should be imposed upon."

"Ah, I see," said the mystified Raynor, "but if I might ask another question—you'll excuse me if I'm impertinent—I noticed that you just now advised your servant to take his gun into the kitchen with him, surely——"

"Pete," interrupted Mr. Hamlin, languidly, "is a good nigger. I shouldn't like to lose him! Perhaps you're right—maybe I am a little over-cautious. But when a man has lost two servants by gunshot wounds inside of three months it makes him careful."

The perfect unconcern of the speaker, the reticence of his companion, and the dead silence of the room in which this extraordinary speech was uttered, filled the measure of Mr. Raynor's astonishment.

"Bless my soul! this is most extraordinary. I have seen nothing of this," he said, appealing in dumb show to his companion.

Mr. Hamlin followed the direction of his eyes. "Your friend is a Californian and knows what we think of any man who lies, and how most men resent such an imputation, and I reckon he'll endorse me!"

The editor muttered a hasty assent that seemed to cover Mr. Hamlin's various propositions, and then hurriedly withdrew, abandoning his charge to Mr. Hamlin. What advantage Jack took of this situation, what extravagant accounts he gravely offered of the vegetation in Lower California, of the resources of the country, of the reckless disregard of life and property, do not strictly belong to the record of this veracious chronicle. Notwithstanding all this, Mr. Raynor found Mr. Hamlin an exceedingly fascinating companion, and later, when the editor had rejoined them, and Mr. Hamlin proceeded to beg that gentleman to warn Mr. Raynor against gambling as the one seductive, besetting sin of California, alleging

that it had been the ruin of both the editor and himself, the tourist was so struck with the frankness and high moral principle of his new acquaintance as to insist upon his making one of their party, an invitation that Mr. Hamlin might have accepted but for the intervention of a singular occurrence.

During the conversation he had been curiously impressed by the appearance of a stranger who had entered and modestly and diffidently taken a seat near the door. To Mr. Hamlin this modesty and diffidence appeared so curiously at variance with his superb physique, and the exceptional strength and power shown in every muscle of his body, that with his usual audacity he felt inclined to go forward and inquire "what was his little game?" That he was lying in wait to be "picked up"—the reader must really excuse me if I continue to borrow Mr. Hamlin's expressive vernacular—that his diffidence and shyness was a deceit and intended to entrap the unwary, he felt satisfied, and was proportionably thrilled with a sense of admiration for him. That a rational human being who held such a hand

should be content with a small *ante*, without "raising the other players," but I beg the fastidious reader's forgiveness.

He was dressed in the ordinary miner's garb of the Southern mines, perhaps a little more cleanly than the average miner by reason of his taste, certainly more picturesque by reason of his statuesque shapeliness. He wore a pair of white duck trousers, a jumper or loose blouse of the same material, with a low-folded sailor's collar and sailor-knotted neckerchief, which displayed, with an unconsciousness quite characteristic of the man, the full muscular column of his sunburnt throat, except where it was hidden by a full tawny beard. His long sandy curls fell naturally and equally on either side of the centre of his low, broad forehead. His fair complexion, although greatly tanned by exposure, seemed to have faded lately as by sickness or great mental distress, a theory that had some confirmation in the fact that he ate but little. His eyes were downcast, or when raised were so shy as to avoid critical examination. Nevertheless his mere superficial exterior

was so striking as to attract the admiration of others besides Mr. Hamlin; to excite the enthusiastic attention of Mr. Raynor, and to enable the editor to offer him as a fair type of the mining population. Embarrassed at last by a scrutiny that asserted itself even through his habitual unconsciousness and pre-occupation, the subject of this criticism arose and returned to the hotel verandah, where his pack and mining implements were lying. Mr. Hamlin, who for the last few days had been in a rather exceptional mood, for some occult reason which he could not explain, felt like respecting the stranger's reserve, and quietly lounged into the billiard-room to wait for the coming of the stage-coach. As soon as his back was turned the editor took occasion to offer Mr. Raynor his own estimate of Mr. Hamlin's character and reputation, to correct his misstatements regarding Californian resources and social habits, and to restore Mr. Raynor's possibly shaken faith in California as a country especially adapted to the secure investment of capital.

"As to the insecurity of life," said the editor, indignantly, "it is as safe here as in New York or Boston. We admit that in the early days the country was cursed by too many adventurers of the type of this very gambler Hamlin, but I will venture to say you will require no better refutation of these calumnies than this very miner whom you admired. He, sir, is a type of our mining population; strong, manly, honest, unassuming, and perfectly gentle and retiring. We are proud, sir, we admit, of such men—eh? Oh, that's nothing—only the arrival of the up-stage!"

It certainly was something more. A momentarily increasing crowd of breathless men were gathered on the verandah before the window and were peering anxiously over each other's head toward a central group among which towered the tall figure of the very miner of whom they had been speaking. More than that, there was a certain undefined restless terror in the air, as when the intense conscious passion or suffering of one or two men communicates itself vaguely without speech, sometimes even

without visible sign, to others. And then Yuba Bill, the driver of the Wingdam coach, strode out from the crowd into the bar-room, drawing from his hands with an evident effort his immense buckskin gloves.

"What's the row, Bill?" said half a dozen voices.

"Nothin'," said Bill, gruffly; "only the Sheriff of Calaveras ez kem down with us hez nabbed his man jest in his very tracks."

"When, Bill?"

"Right yer—on this very verandy—furst man he seed!"

"What for?" "who?" "what hed he bin doin'?" "who is it?" "what's up?" persisted the chorus.

"Killed a man up at One Horse Gulch, last night," said Bill, grasping the decanter which the attentive bar-keeper had, without previous request, placed before him.

"Who did he kill, Bill?"

"A little Mexican from 'Frisco by the name o' Ramirez."

"What's the man's name that killed him —the man that you took?"

The voice was Jack Hamlin's.

Yuba Bill instantly turned, put down his glass, wiped his mouth with his sleeve, and then deliberately held out his great hand with an exhaustive grin. "Dern my skin, ole man, if it ain't you! And how's things, eh? Yer lookin' a little white in the gills, but peart and sassy, ez usual. Heerd you was kinder off colour, down in Sacramento lass week. And it's you, ole fell, and jest in time! Bar-keep—hist that pizen over to Jack. Here to ye agin, ole man! But I'm glad to see ye!"

The crowd hung breathless over the two men—awe-struck and respectful. It was a meeting of the gods—Jack Hamlin and Yuba Bill. None dare speak. Hamlin broke the silence at last, and put down his glass.

"What," he asked, lazily, yet with a slight colour on his cheek, "did you say was the name of the chap that fetched that little Mexican?"

"Gabriel Conroy," said Bill.

CHAPTER II.

MR. HAMLIN TAKES A HAND.

THE capture had been effected quietly. To the evident astonishment of his captor, Gabriel had offered no resistance, but had yielded himself up with a certain composed willingness as if it were only the preliminary step to the quicker solution of a problem that was sure to be solved. It was observed, however, that he showed a degree of caution that was new to him—asking to see the warrant, the particulars of the discovery of the body, and utterly withholding that voluble explanation or apology which all who knew his character confidently expected him to give, whether guilty or innocent—a caution which, accepted by them as simply the low cunning of the criminal, told against him. He

submitted quietly to a search that, however, disclosed no concealed weapon or anything of import. But when a pair of handcuffs were shown him, he changed colour, and those that were nearest to him saw that he breathed hurriedly, and hesitated in the first words of some protest that rose to his lips. The sheriff, a man of known intrepidity, who had the rapid and clear intuition that comes with courageous self-possession, noticed it also, and quietly put the handcuffs back in his pocket.

"I reckon there's no use for 'em here; ef *you're* willin' to take the risks, *I* am."

The eyes of the two men met, and Gabriel thanked him. In that look he recognised and accepted the fact that on a motion to escape he would be instantly killed.

They were to return with the next stage, and in the interval Gabriel was placed in an upper room, and securely guarded. Here, falling into his old apologetic manner, he asked permission to smoke a pipe, which was at once granted by his good-humoured guard, and then threw himself at full length upon the bed. The rising wind rattled the

windows noisily, and entering tossed the smoke-wreaths that rose from his pipe in fitful waves about the room. The guard, who was much more embarrassed than his charge, was relieved of an ineffectual attempt to carry on a conversation suitable to the occasion by Gabriel's simple directness—

"You needn't put yourself out to pass the time o' day with me," he said, gently, "that bein' extry to your reg'lar work. Ef you hev any friends ez you'd like to talk to in your own line, invite 'em in, and don't mind me."

But here the guard's embarrassment was further relieved by the entrance of Joe Hall, the sheriff.

"There's a gentleman here to speak with you," he said to Gabriel, "he can stay until we're ready to go." Turning to the guard, he added, "You can take a chair outside the door in the hall. It's all right, it's the prisoner's counsel."

At the word Gabriel looked up. Following the sheriff, Lawyer Maxwell entered the room. He approached Gabriel, and extended with grave cordiality a hand that had ap-

parently wiped from his mouth the last trace of mirthfulness at the door.

"I did not expect to see you again so soon, Gabriel, but as quickly as the news reached me, and I heard that our friend Hall had a warrant for you, I started after him. I would have got here before him, but my horse gave out." He paused, and looked steadily at Gabriel. "Well!"

Gabriel looked at him in return, but did not speak.

"I supposed you would need professional aid," he went on, with a slight hesitation, "perhaps *mine*—knowing that I was aware of some of the circumstances that preceded this affair."

"Wot circumstances?" asked Gabriel, with the sudden look of cunning that had before prejudiced his captors.

"For Heaven's sake, Gabriel," said Maxwell, rising with a gesture of impatience, "don't let us repeat the blunder of our first interview. *This* is a serious matter; *may be* very serious to you. Think a moment. Yesterday you sought my professional aid to deed to your wife all your property,

telling me that you were going away never to return to One Horse Gulch. I do not ask you now *why* you did it. I only want you to reflect that I am just now the only man who knows that circumstance—a circumstance that I can tell you as a lawyer is somewhat important in the light of the crime that you are now charged with."

Maxwell waited for Gabriel to speak, wiping away as he waited the usual smile that lingered around his lips. But Gabriel said nothing.

"Gabriel Conroy," said Lawyer Maxwell, suddenly dropping into the vernacular of One Horse Gulch, "are you a fool?"

"Thet's so," said Gabriel, with the simplicity of a man admitting a self-evident proposition. "Thet's so; I reckon I are."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Maxwell, again swiftly turning upon him, "if you were!" He stopped, as if ashamed of his abruptness, and said more quietly and persuasively, "Come, Gabriel, if you wont confess to *me*, I suppose that I must to *you*. Six months ago I thought you an impostor. Six months ago the woman who is now your

wife charged you with being an impostor; with assuming a name and right that did not belong to you; in plain English, said that you had set yourself up as Gabriel Conroy, and that she, who was Grace Conroy, the sister of the real Gabriel, knew that you lied. She substantiated all this by proofs; hang it," continued Maxwell, appealing in dumb show to the walls, "there isn't a lawyer living as wouldn't have said it was a good case, and been ready to push it in any court. Under these circumstances I sought you, and you remember how. You know the result of that interview. I can tell you now that if there ever was a man who palpably confessed to guilt when he was innocent, *you* were that man. Well, after your conduct there was explained by Olly, without, however, damaging the original evidence against you, or prejudicing her rights, this woman came to me and said that she had discovered that you were the man who had saved her life at the risk of your own, and that for the present she could not, in delicacy, push her claim. When afterwards she told me that this

gratitude had—well, ripened into something more serious, and that she had engaged herself to marry you, and so condone your offence, why, it was woman-like and natural, and I suspected nothing. I believed her story—believed she had a case. Yes, sir; the last six months I have looked upon you as the creature of that woman's foolish magnanimity. I could see that she was soft on you, and believed that you had fooled her. I did, hang me! There, if you confess to being a fool, I do to having been an infernal sight bigger one."

He stopped, erased the mirthful past with his hand, and went on—

"I began to suspect something when you came to me yesterday with this story of your going away, and this disposal of your property. When I heard of the murder of this stranger—one of your wife's witnesses to her claim near your house, your own flight, and the sudden disappearance of your wife, my suspicions were strengthened. And when I read this note from your wife, delivered to you last night by one of her servants, and picked up early this morning

near the body, my suspicions were confirmed."

As he finished he took from his pocket a folded paper and handed it to Gabriel. He received it mechanically, and opened it. It was his wife's note of the preceding night. He took out his knife, still holding the letter, and with its blade began stirring the bowl of his pipe. Then, after a pause, he asked, cautiously—

"And how did *ye* come by this yer?"

"It was found by Sal Clark, brought to Mrs. Markle, and given to me. Its existence is known only to three people, and they are your friends."

There was another pause, in which Gabriel deliberately stirred the contents of his pipe. Mr. Maxwell examined him curiously.

"Well," he said, at last, "what is your defence?"

Gabriel sat up on the bed and rapped the bowl of his pipe against the bedpost to loosen some refractory encrustation.

"Wot," he asked, gravely, "would be *your* idee of a good de–fence? Axin ye ez a lawyer having experin's in them things, and

reck'nin' to pay ez high ez eny man fo' the same, wot would *you* call a good defence?" and he gravely laid himself down again in an attitude of respectful attention.

"We hope to prove," said Maxwell, really smiling, "that when you left your house and came to my office the murdered man was alive and at his hotel; that he went over to the hill long before you did; that *you* did not return until evening—*after* the murder was committed, as the 'secret' mentioned in your wife's mysterious note evidently shows. That for some reason or other it was her design to place you in a suspicious attitude. That the note shows that she refers to some fact of which she was cognizant and not yourself."

"Suthin' thet she knowed, and I didn't get to hear," translated Gabriel, quietly.

"Exactly! Now you see the importance of that note."

Gabriel did not immediately reply, but slowly lifted his huge frame from the bed, walked to the open window, still holding the paper in his hands, deliberately tore it into the minutest shreds before the lawyer

could interfere, and then threw it from the window.

"Thet paper don't 'mount ter beans, no how!" he said, quietly, but explanatively as he returned to the bed.

It was Lawyer Maxwell's turn to become dumb. In his astonished abstraction he forgot to wipe his mouth, and gazed at Gabriel with his nervous smile as if his client had just perpetrated a practical joke of the first magnitude.

"Ef it's the same to you, I'll just gin ye my idee of a de-fence," said Gabriel, apologetically, relighting his pipe, "allowin' o' course, thet you knows best, and askin' no deduckshun from your charges for advice. Well, you jess stands up afore the jedge, and you slings 'em a yarn suthin' like this: 'Yer's me, for instans,' you sez, sez you, 'ez gambols—gambols very deep—jess fights the tiger, wharever and whenever found, the same bein' onbeknownst ter folks gin'rally, and spechil ter my wife, ez was, July. Yer's me been gambolin' desprit with this yer man, Victyor Ramyirez, and gets lifted bad! and we hez, so to speak, a

differculty about some pints in the game. I allows one thing, he allows another, and this yer man gives me the lie and I stabs him!' Stop—hole your hosses!" interjected Gabriel, suddenly, "thet looks bad, don't it? he bein' a small man, a little feller 'bout your size. No! Well, this yer's the way we puts it up: 'Seving men—*seving*—friends o' his, comes at me, permiskis like, one down, and nex' comes on, and we hez it mighty lively thar fur an hour, until me, bein' in a tight place, hez to use a knife and cuts this yer man bad!' Thar, that's 'bout the thing! Now ez to my runnin' away, you sez, sez you, ez how I disremembers owin' to the 'citement that I hez a 'pintment in Sacramento the very nex' day, and waltzes down yer to keep it, in a hurry. Ef they want to know whar July ez, you sez she gits wild on my not comin' home, and starts thet very night arter me. Thar, thet's 'bout my idee—puttin' it o' course in your own shape, and slingin' in them bits o' po'try and garbage, and kinder sassin' the plaintiff's counsel, ez you know goes down afore a jedge and jury.'"

Maxwell rose hopelessly,—"Then, if I understand you, you intend to admit——"

"Thet I done it? In course!" replied Gabriel; "but," he added, with a cunning twinkle in his eye, "justifybly—justifyble homyside, ye mind!—bein' in fear o' my life from seving men. In course," he added, hurriedly, "I can't identify them seving strangers in the dark, so thar's no harm or suspicion goin' to be done enny o' the boys in the Gulch."

Maxwell walked gravely to the window, and stood looking out without speaking. Suddenly he turned upon Gabriel with a brighter face and more earnest manner. "Where's Olly?"

Gabriel's face fell. He hesitated a moment, "I was on my way to the school in Sacramento whar she iz."

"You must send for her—I must see her at once!"

Gabriel laid his powerful hand on the lawyer's shoulder. "She izn't—that chile—to know anythin' o' this. You hear?" he said, in a voice that began in tones of deprecation, and ended in a note of stern warning.

"How are you to keep it from her?" said Maxwell, as determinedly. "In less than twenty-four hours every newspaper in the State will have it—with their own version and comments. No; you must see her. She must hear it first from your own lips."

"But—I—can't—see—her just now," said Gabriel, with a voice that for the first time during their interview faltered in its accents.

"Nor need you," responded the lawyer, quickly. "Trust that to me. *I* will see her, and you shall afterwards. You need not fear I will prejudice your case. Give me the address! Quick!" he added, as the sound of footsteps and voices approaching the room, came from the hall. Gabriel did as he requested. "Now one word," he continued, hurriedly, as the footsteps halted at the door.

"Yes," said Gabriel.

"As you value your life and Olly's happiness, hold your tongue."

Gabriel nodded with cunning comprehension. The door opened to Mr. Jack Hamlin, diabolically mischievous, self-confident, and

audacious! With a familiar nod to Maxwell he stepped quickly before Gabriel and extended his hand. Simply, yet conscious of obeying some vague magnetic influence, Gabriel reached out his own hand and took Jack's white, nervous fingers in his own calm massive grasp.

"Glad to see you, pard!" said that gentleman, showing his white teeth and reaching up to clap his disengaged hand on Gabriel's shoulder. "Glad to see you, old boy,—even if you have cut in and taken a job out of my hands that I was rather lyin' by to do myself. Sooner or later I'd have fetched that Mexican—if you hadn't dropped into my seat and taken up my hand. Oh, it's all right, Mack!" he said, intercepting the quick look of caution that Maxwell darted at his client, "don't do that. We're all friends here. If you want me to testify I'll take my oath that there hasn't been a day this six months that that infernal hound, Ramirez, wasn't jest pantin' to be planted in his tracks! I can hardly believe I ain't done it, myself." He stopped, partly to enjoy the palpable uneasiness of Maxwell,

and perhaps in some admiration of Gabriel's physique.

Maxwell quickly seized this point of vantage. "You can do your friend, here, a very great service," he said to Jack, lowering his voice as he spoke.

Jack laughed. "No, Mack, it wont do! They wouldn't believe me! There ain't judge or jury you could play that on!"

"You don't understand me," said Maxwell, laughing a little awkwardly. "I didn't mean that, Jack. This man was going to Sacramento to see his little sister——"

"Go on," said Jack, with much gravity; "of course he was! I know that. 'Dear Brother, Dear Brother, come home with me now!' Certainly. So'm I. Goin' to see an innocent little thing 'bout seventeen years old, blue eyes and curly hair! Always go there once a week. Says he must come! Says she'll——" he stopped in the full tide of his irony, for, looking up, he caught a glimpse of Gabriel's simple, troubled face and his sadly reproachful eyes. "Look here," said Jack, turning savagely on Maxwell, "what are you talkin' about anyway?"

"I mean what I say," returned Maxwell, quickly. "He was going to see his sister—a mere child! Of course he can't go now. But he must see her—if she can be brought to him! Can you—*will* you do it?"

Jack cast another swift glance at Gabriel. "Count me in," he said, promptly; "when shall I go?"

"Now—at once!"

"All right. Where shall I fetch her to?"

"One Horse Gulch."

"The game's made," said Jack, sententiously. "She'll be there by sundown to-morrow!" He was off like a flash, but as swiftly returned, and called Maxwell to the door. "Look here," he said, in a whisper, "p'r'aps it would be as well if the sheriff didn't know I was *his* friend," he went on, indicating Gabriel with a toss of his head and a wink of his black eye, "because, you see, Joe Hall and I ain't friends! We had a little difficulty, and some shootin' and foolishness down at Marysville last year. Joe's a good square man, but he ain't above prejudice, and it might go against our man."

Maxwell nodded, and Jack once more darted off.

But his colour was so high, and his exaltation so excessive, that when he reached his room his faithful Pete looked at him in undisguised alarm. "Bress us—it tain't no whisky, Mars Jack, arter all de doctors tole you?" he said, clasping his hands in dismay.

The bare suggestion was enough for Jack, in his present hilarious humour. He instantly hiccuped, lapsed wildly over against Pete with artfully simulated alcoholic weakness, tumbled him on the floor, and grasping his white woolly head, waved over it a boot-jack, and frantically demanded "another bottle." Then he laughed; as suddenly got up with the greatest gravity and a complete change in his demeanour, and wanted to know, severely, what he, Pete, meant by lying there on the floor in a state of beastly intoxication?

"Bress me! Mars Jack, but ye *did* frighten me. I jiss allowed dem tourists downstairs had been gettin' ye tight."

"You did—you degraded old ruffian! If

you'd been reading Volney's 'Ruins,' or reflectin' on some of those moral maxims that I'm just wastin' my time and health unloading to you, instead of making me the subject of your inebriated reveries, you wouldn't get picked up so often. Pack my valise, and chuck it into some horse and buggy—no matter whose. Be quick."

"Is we gwine to Sacramento, Mars Jack?"

"*We?* No, sir. *I'm* going—alone! What I'm doing now, sir, is only the result of calm reflection—of lying awake nights taking points and jest spottin' the whole situation. And I'm convinced, Peter, that I can stay with you no longer. You've been hackin' the keen edge of my finer feelin's; playin' it very low down on my moral and religious nature, and generally ringin' in a cold deck on my spiritual condition for the last five years. You've jest cut up thet rough with my higher emotions thet there ain't enough left to chip in on a ten-cent ante. Five years ago," continued Jack, coolly, brushing his curls before the glass, "I fell into your hands, a guileless,

simple youth, in the first flush of manhood, knowin' no points, easily picked up on my sensibilities, and travellin', so to speak, on my shape! And where am I now? Echo answers 'where?' and passes for a euchre! No, Peter, I leave you to-night. Wretched misleader of youth, gummy old man with the strawberry eyebrows, farewell!"

Evidently this style of exordium was no novelty to Pete, for without apparently paying the least attention to it, he went on, surlily packing his master's valise. When he had finished, he looked up at Mr. Hamlin, who was humming, in a heart-broken way, "*Yes, we must Part,*" varied by occasional glances of exaggerated reproach at Pete, and said, as he shouldered the valise—

"Dis yer ain't no woman foolishness, Mars Jack, like down at dat yar Mission?"

"Your suggestion, Peter," returned Jack, with dignity, "emanates from a moral sentiment debased by Love Feasts and Camp Meetings, and an intellect weakened by Rum and Gum and the contact of Lager Beer Jerkers. It is worthy of a

short-card sharp and a keno flopper, which I have, I regret to say, long suspected you to be. Farewell! You will stay here until I come back. If I don't come back by the day after to-morrow, come to One Horse Gulch. Pay the bill, and don't knock down for yourself more than seventy-five per cent. Remember I am getting old and feeble. You are yet young with a brilliant future before you. Git."

He tossed a handful of gold on the bed, adjusted his hat carefully over his curls, and strode from the room. In the lower hall he stopped long enough to take aside Mr. Raynor, and with an appearance of the greatest conscientiousness, to correct an error of two feet in the measurements he had given him that morning of an enormous pine tree in whose prostrate trunk he, Mr. Hamlin, had once found a peaceful, happy tribe of one hundred Indians living. Then lifting his hat with marked politeness to Mrs. Raynor, and totally ignoring the presence of Mr. Raynor's mentor and companion, he leaped lightly into the buggy and drove away.

"An entertaining fellow," said Mr. Raynor, glancing after the cloud of dust that flew from the untarrying wheels of Mr. Hamlin's chariot.

"And so gentlemanly," smiled Mrs. Raynor.

But the journalistic conservator of the public morals of California, in and for the city and county of San Francisco, looked grave, and deprecated even that feeble praise of the departed. "His class are a curse to the country. They hold the law in contempt; they retard by the example of their extravagance the virtues of economy and thrift; they are consumers and not producers; they bring the fair fame of this land into question by those who foolishly take them for a type of the people."

"But, dear me," said Mrs. Raynor, pouting, "where your gamblers and bad men are so fascinating, and your honest miners are so dreadfully murderous, and kill people, and then sit down to breakfast with you as if nothing had happened, what are you going to do?"

The journalist did not immediately reply.

In the course of some eloquent remarks, as unexceptionable in morality as in diction, which I regret I have not space to reproduce here, he, however, intimated that there was still an Unfettered Press, which "scintillated" and "shone" and "lashed" and "stung" and "exposed" and "tore away the veil," and became at various times a Palladium and a Watchtower, and did and was a great many other remarkable things peculiar to an Unfettered Press in a pioneer community, when untrammelled by the enervating conditions of an effete civilization.

"And what have they done with the murderer?" asked Mr. Raynor, repressing a slight yawn.

"Taken him back to One Horse Gulch half an hour ago. I reckon he'd as lief stayed here," said a bystander. "From the way things are pintin', it looks as if it might be putty lively for him up thar!"

"What do you mean?" asked Raynor, curiously.

"Well, two or three of them old Vigi-

lantes from Angel's passed yer a minit ago with their rifles, goin' up that way," returned the man, lazily. "Mayn't be nothing in it, but it looks mighty like——"

"Like what?" asked Mr. Raynor, a little nervously.

"Lynchin'!" said the man.

END OF VOL. II.

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